

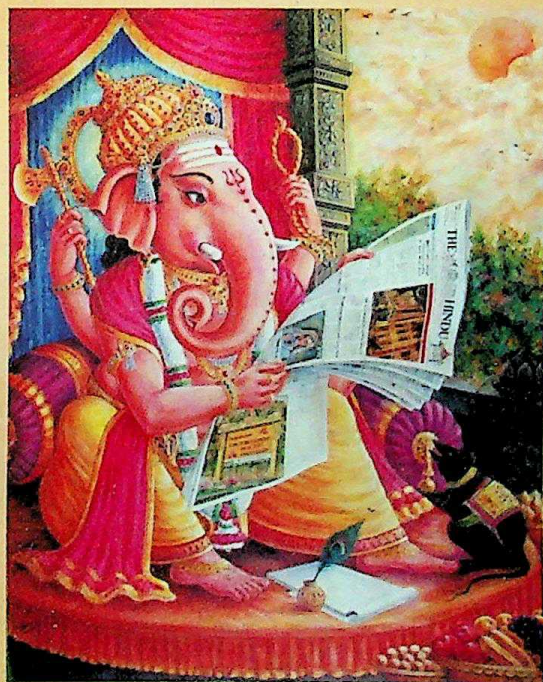
OXFORD INDIA PAPERBACKS

Gandhi Memorial College of Education, Santalpur, Jamnagar

INDIA'S NEWSPAPER REVOLUTION

Capitalism, Politics and the
Indian-language Press

THIRD EDITION.



Robin Jeffrey

‘comprehensive, lively and readable.’

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INDIA'S NEWSPAPER REVOLUTION

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ROBIN JEFFREY

India's Newspaper Revolution

*Capitalism, Politics and the
Indian-Language Press*

Third Edition

G.M. College of Education
Raipur, Bantalab
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INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION

There has never been a newspaper revolution like India's. The spread of computer technology and offset presses from the 1980s, prodded by awakening capitalism, made the printing of newspapers a hotly competitive, mass-market industry in ten different scripts and a dozen languages. The results varied with languages and cultures, as an earlier series of essays tried to show.¹ Yet, regardless of the region, many of the processes are similar: the Indian-language newspaper industry is mounting a well-worn global treadmill of newspaper development. In economic terms, many of the outcomes are predictable; but the consequences for regional cultures and political processes are wide and open questions. One answer is certain: they will change; they have changed.

This book, which was completed in 1999, explored the origins of this story. The new introduction focuses on three aspects of change since 1999: the dissolving of Nehruvian India—the Indian state formed after Independence in 1947; the capitalism and consumerism that eroded the old state and drove the expansion of the newspaper industry; and the imponderables that new communications technology lay in the path of India's future.

Daily newspaper circulations in India's 13 major languages more than doubled in the 1990s.² In terms of availability (or "penetration"), this meant that in 2001, when India's population was 1,020 million people, there were about 58 daily newspapers for every 1,000 Indians, more than three and half times the level of 25 years earlier.³ In five years, between 1996 and 2001, penetration grew by 35 per cent (pp. 1, 47).

The processes of limb-stretching, awakening capitalism, as they work

¹ See the eleven essays on newspapers in India's major languages that ran in the *Economic and Political Weekly* from 4–11 January until 29 March 1997.

² This is regardless of whether we use the magnified but indicative figures of the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) or the more sober statistics of the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC). According to the RNI, daily circulations grew from 21.9 million copies to 58.5 million between 1990 and 2000—167 per cent. Circulations of dailies that were members of the Audit Bureau of Circulations grew from 12 million in 1991 to 26.4 million—120 per cent. *Press in India 2001* [hereafter *PII* + relevant year] (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2001), p. 29 and *PII 1991*, p. 37. Audit Bureau of Circulations, *A Preliminary List of Circulation for the Six Monthly Audited period ended 30th June 2001* [hereafter *ABC* + months and year] (Mumbai: ABC, 2001) and *ABC January-June 1991*.

³ See below, p. 48. The population figures are for total population, including children. In 1996, Norway was credited with the world's highest levels of newspaper penetration: 588 newspapers for every 1,000 people. In 1996 India was 43:1000 and Australia 293, Canada 159, Indonesia 24, Japan 578, Pakistan 23, Philippines 79, South Korea 393, Thailand 63, Turkey 111, United Kingdom 329, United States 215. Mark Balnaves et al., *The Penguin Atlas of Media and Information* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001), pp. 110–17.

themselves out in the newspaper industries of India's languages, are immensely dynamic. Newspaper businesses jockey for position; fortunes quickly fluctuate. When the first edition of this book was completed in 1999, the highest circulating daily in Hindi was *Dainik Jagran*, based in Kanpur and selling 820,000 copies a day. Well back was *Dainik Bhaskar* of Bhopal at 330,000 copies a day.⁴ Three years later, *Bhaskar* had become the largest selling Indian-language daily: nearly 1.6 million copies a day, produced from 14 centres; *Jagran* sold 1.4 million.⁵

Founded in 1958, *Bhaskar* ("the sun") was similar to other Hindi dailies of north India in that its owners were merchant-caste Hindus with varied business interests. They expanded their newspaper by taking it into new centres, marketing it intensively and giving it strong local content.⁶ One of their models, they said, was *USA Today*, the national daily produced by the Gannett chain in the US since 1982.⁷ One of *Dainik Bhaskar's* achievements was to start an edition in Jaipur, capital of Rajasthan state in 1997, and to surpass a strong existing daily, *Rajasthan Patrika*, within two years. From the Jaipur base, *Bhaskar* opened editions in five other towns in the state and forced *Rajasthan Patrika* to expand into smaller towns as well. In 1991, Rajasthan had newspaper penetration of 20 dailies for every 1000 people. By the year 2000, penetration had tripled to more than 60 dailies per thousand.⁸

What are the effects on people who come to consume newspapers for the first time? According to its owners, *Bhaskar* sought to attract new readers, rather simply to win readers from other newspapers. It brought to such new readers, according to *Bhaskar's* account, a newspaper the readers themselves had helped to create as a result of wide, survey-based research.⁹ Regular newspaper consumption of this kind introduces new readers to different ways of seeing themselves and conducting their politics and their lives—marrying and mourning, buying and selling. In Rajasthan in the year 2000, three times as many people conducted such transactions in a place that we can call "public", in ways that were *not* face-to-face, than had done so ten years before. What goes on in that public place may take many forms, because newspapers reflect their readers more than they mould them. But

⁴ ABC January-June 1999.

⁵ ABC January-June 2002. The English daily, the *Times of India*, had an audited circulation of 2.1 million.

⁶ *Business India* [hereafter *BI*], 30 April-13 May 2001, pp. 98-9. Interview, Alok Mehta, former editor, *Dainik Bhaskar*, Melbourne, 3 May 2003. *A&M*, 31 December 1996, p. 102.

⁷ *BI*, 14-27 June 1999, p. 107.

⁸ *PII*, 1992, p. 270 and *PII*, 2001, p. 195 for circulation of dailies. Rajasthan's population was 43.9 million in 1991 and 54.5 million in 2001. The basis, value and defects of these calculations are discussed below (p. 48). Rajasthan's literacy rate rose from 39 per cent to 61 per cent in the same period.

⁹ *BI*, 14-27 June 1999, pp. 106-07.

newspapers do bring “public-ness” to people who did not previously know it, and this may be a liberating, beneficial and dangerous thing (see pp. 11–19). A *Bhaskar* journalist was murdered in 2001, allegedly for writing stories that exposed local criminals.¹⁰

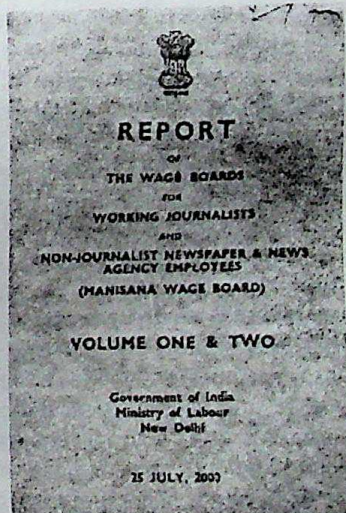
Three documents dramatize the transitions sweeping through media in India in the three years since this book was published. They present themselves almost like suits of clothes. The first is a rumpled *dhoti*, with perhaps a faint pink tinge, as if it had been in the wash with the bunting from a communist rally. It represents an India that is fading away. The second is a checkered sports coat, capturing a pushy, capitalist India that demands recognition. And the third is the ethnic chic of a handwoven, well-cut *kurta*, the hopeful aspect of a future that is both unpredictable and possibly dark.

Withering Away of the State

The *Report of the Wage Boards for Working Journalists* is pink, A4-sized and about a centimetre thick. Its cardboard cover has the texture of soggy cornflakes and tears easily. Beneath the three lions of the Ashoka capital, emblem of the Government of India, is the full title, *Report of the Wage Boards for Working Journalists and Non-Journalist Newspaper and News Agency Employees* (Manisana Wage Board) Volume I & II.¹¹

Inside, the paper is porous, and the ink, though faint to avoid blotching, blotches nevertheless, like liverspots on the skin of an old man. The 188 pages are bound with two hefty Government of India staples, whose relatives hold together bundles of bank notes and gash the fingers of the greedy and unwary. The smell of the whole package—paper, ink, cardboard, rusting staples, a whiff of glue—recalls delights in book stores, libraries, godowns and print shops wherever Indian printed matter is consumed, stored or made.

The Manisana Report, named after its chairman, R. K. Manisana Singh, former Chief Justice of the Gauhati High Court in northeastern India, will probably be



¹⁰ *The Week*, 28 April 2002, <http://www.the-week.com/22apr28/events5.htm>).

¹¹ (New Delhi: Government of India, Ministry of Labour, 25 July 2000) [hereafter *Manisana*].

the last of its kind. It is the sixth wage board for Indian newspaper employees since the system of laying down national wage scales began in 1955 (see pp. 141–2). The Manisana Report does what its predecessors did: it sets out wage awards, job definitions, appeal procedures, legal precedents and an array of administrative detail in a style so turgid and a typography so forbidding that only lawyers and printers are ever likely to have processed every word.

The wage board reports were part of the mechanism of the Indian state created in the 1950s, based on a belief that government management and regulation could work quickly to improve the lot of large numbers of people. This was the essence of “Nehruvian socialism”, derived from Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964; Prime Minister, 1947–64), in which capitalism and capitalists were to be tolerated, but controlled. That this philosophy of government flowed into the newspaper industry was not surprising, since capitalism and newspapers have grown up together all over the world.

In the early years of Independence, there were three sorts of newspaper owners in India. The nationalist struggle against the British produced newspapers owned by patriots who were prepared to lose money on their publications to advance the cause. Second, some Indian families were in the newspaper business to make a living and not to lead the fight against British rule; they built strong investments and sailed only as close to the wind of imperial disapproval as they thought prudent. Third, British capitalists ran English-language newspapers for profit and the entertainment of the British and their Indian associates. The first two categories, in some forms, survived the departure of the British, and as late as the 1990s, a few Indian-language newspaper proprietors were proud to say that they did *not* go looking for advertisements. They ran their newspapers, they said, as a public service and it was therefore the duty of governments to scatter advertising revenue their way, as recognition of their contribution to society (see p. 55).

Bodies like the Manisana Wage Board were part of a government apparatus of direction, regulation and largesse. The Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) was a similar body, also established during the bureaucratic building spree of the mid-1950s. The Registrar’s duties are to record data about every periodical published in India. Like the wage boards, the Registrar produces reports—annually, in this case—that compile a great deal of data, the quality of which may be questionable, but which, over time, indicate broad trends.

Such trends provide evidence for the claim of “newspaper revolution”. In five years between 1993 and 1998, daily newspaper circulation doubled. When this book was first published, the Registrar’s figures were available only up to 1996. They estimated daily circulation at 40.2 million copies for the 13 largest languages (see p. 47). Four years later, this had grown to

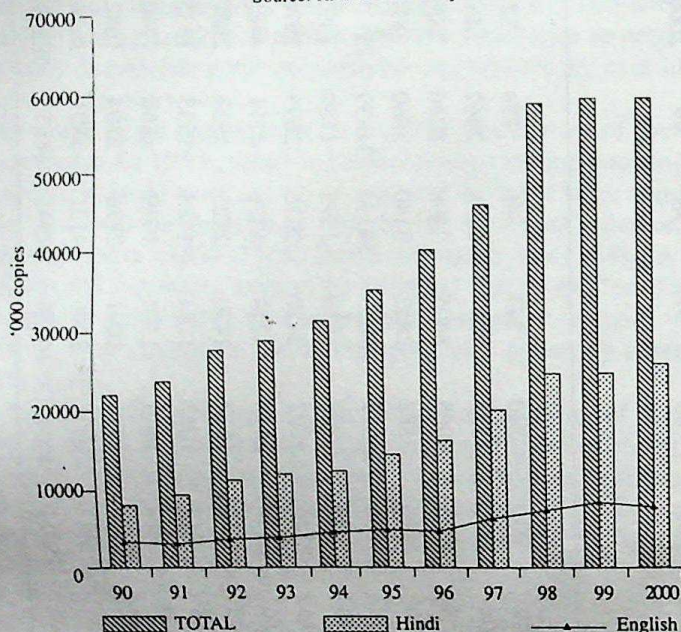
Table A: DAILY CIRCULATIONS, 1990-2000
'000 OF COPIES

	1990	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	2000	% growth 1990- 2000
LANGUAGE												
Assamese	45	44	205	201	149	230	340	344	346	294	321	613
Bengali	1056	955	1242	1422	1604	1806	1537	1727	2179	2467	2461	133
English	3409	3109	3886	3849	4658	4915	4965	6405	7498	8246	7851	130
Gujarati	1640	1904	1879	1640	1836	1610	2582	2852	3140	3560	2813	72
Hindi	7836	9305	11221	11966	12330	14286	16059	19829	24344	24439	25577	226
Kannada	614	697	720	696	898	959	909	930	1393	1180	1392	127
Malayalam	1212	1537	2061	1732	1985	2146	2692	2427	2636	2695	2976	146
Marathi	1976	1953	1985	2348	2486	2436	2476	3249	4356	4211	4485	127
Oriya	618	697	759	897	812	1253	1220	1430	2125	1937	2057	233
Punjabi	439	654	716	809	928	913	1037	1254	1583	1535	1535	250
Tamil	1297	1186	1371	1301	1290	992	1676	1304	1949	1868	1740	34
Telugu	356	664	532	916	962	1823	1518	1091	2276	2104	1682	372
Urdu	1406	1440	1410	1394	1506	1882	3001	2796	4121	3801	3614	157
TOTAL	21904	24145	27987	29171	31444	35251	40012	45638	57946	58337	58504	167

Source: Press in India for relevant years.

Daily Circulations, 1990–2000:
All Languages and Hindi and English

Source: RNI for relevant years



58.5 million, an increase of 45 per cent.¹² These increases occurred at a time when newspapers in most parts of the world experienced declines in circulation, and when television, often thought to herald the death of newspapers, was sweeping across India. Indeed, by 2001 India was estimated to have 70 million television households, which meant that more than a third of the population could watch television.¹³

Newspaper circulations in Hindi, the national language, spoken by about 40 per cent of the population, more than trebled in 11 years, from 7.8 million copies a day in 1990 to 25.6 million a day in 2000. They doubled between 1994 and 1998, from 12.3 million a day to 24.3 million. (See Table A). Other languages showed even more spectacular increases.

¹² *PII 2001*, p. 29. The total daily circulation, including the smaller languages, was 59.2 million. *ABC January-June 2001*. The audited figure of the ABC in 2001 was 26.4 million newspapers a day. See pp. 48, 64, 78, 107–08, for a discussion of the roles and reliability of the ABC and RNI.

¹³ *Media Guide India* (Mumbai: SSC&B Lintas, May 2003), pp. 11–12. “A household” in these survey conventions is estimated to contain 5.6 members.

Circulations in Telugu quadrupled and in Oriya and Punjabi trebled. In Assamese, they may have increased by as much as seven times.¹⁴

The growth of Indian-language newspapers, which had begun well before the 1990s, signifies the spread of Indian capitalism and its organizing principles and values. The need to show larger audiences to national advertisers drives the aggressive expansion of these newspapers. They need rising circulation figures to retain their advertisers in the face of challenges from television and other newspapers, to capture ads from rivals and to entice new advertisers into their region. The Registrar recorded 5,364 daily newspaper offices in 2000, up nearly 90 per cent from 2,856 in 1990.¹⁵ In part, newspaper owners had opened new offices and pushed their papers into the small towns of rural India in order to survive (see below, pp. 83, 209).

In the 1990s, as the Indian economy was shorn of many government controls, capitalism came out of the closet. Most newspapers grew and profited. The Manisana Wage Board collected information about the gross revenue and profits of major newspapers. Proprietors had an interest in showing low incomes to an authority charged with revising the wages of employees. Thus if these figures are taken at anything like face value, the biggest newspapers prospered in the 1990s. The comparative data in Table B suggest—though the data have to be regarded as highly tentative—that four of the five of the groups were making *profits* in the mid-1990s that represented 20 per cent of their *total turnover* of a few years before. Indeed, of the 57 publications from which the Manisana Wage Board got economic data, only six claimed to be making losses in 1996–8.¹⁶ The report concluded that the “industry has an ever expanding market” and “the climate ... is very much favourable”.¹⁷

In seeking to prevent recommendations for large salary increases, proprietors emphasized the perils of the business in the 1990s. They focused on the challenge of television, which increasingly skimmed off advertising revenue, and the cost of modernization of the newspaper industry, which was essential if newspapers were to survive the television onslaught. They claimed that the share of print in advertising expenditure in India had

¹⁴ The Registrar's figures need to be treated cautiously, especially for the smaller, more remote regions, where checking is difficult and unlikely. The Assamese numbers, however, seem to hold a story worth researching.

¹⁵ *PII, 2001*, pp. 18, 23; *PII, 1991*, pp. 17, 141. In 2000, 1,493 dailies actually filed their returns with the Registrar; but that represented a 57 per cent increase over the 952 who did so in 1990.

¹⁶ *Manisana*, pp. 184–5.

¹⁷ *Manisana*, p. 60. For small proprietors' dismay, see Note of Dissent by Pratap T. Shah, 20 July 2000, in *Manisana*, pp. 121–4. A *Business Standard* survey at the end of 2002 concluded that Bennett and Coleman, publishers of the *Times of India*, “was the second most profitable unlisted company in India.” “Business Standard 1000,” December 2002, at www.thehoot.org/story.asp?storyid=Web210214166108hoot12302002684&pn=1.

fallen from 67 per cent in 1994 to 56 per cent in 1997, while television's share had risen from 22 per cent to 36 per cent.¹⁸ Journalists' unions, however, replied that television was "complementary to print media". The report approvingly quoted Abe Rosenthal of the *New York Times*: "TV is really the best salesman for print".¹⁹ The evidence in this book suggests that such a claim has particular force in India, where large sections of the population are becoming literate. Television glamorizes literacy and the ability to use print. "Most people ... rely", Kirk Johnson writes of a village in Maharashtra in the 1990s,

on the morning and evening television newscasts for their information. The newspaper is seen as a status symbol reserved for those with a greater education; people who receive the newspaper are thought of as intelligent and are sought for advice in important matters.²⁰

Table B: PROFIT AND ESTIMATED "TURNOVER" FOR FIVE GROUPS, 1992-3 AND 1996-8

<i>Publication Group</i>	<i>Average gross revenue, 1996-8 (crores)</i>	<i>Average gross profit, 1996-8 (crores)</i>	<i>Estimated 'turn-over' 1992-3 (crores)</i>
Bennett Coleman Co. Ltd (primarily English)	785.1	183.5	400
Hind Samachar (Hindi)	136.9	19.9	'touching' 100
Malayala Manorama (Malayalam)	159.9	14.2	50
Mathrubhumi (Malayalam)	90.7	10.4	40
Sakal (Marathi)	64.8	4.3	30

Sources: For 1996-8, *Manisana*, pp. 184-5, which lists 57 publications that provided information to the inquiry. For, 1992-3, see p. 127. 10 crores equals about US \$2.2 million. (Calculated at Rs 45 to US\$1.00). I use these five groups because they are also in the table on p. 127. Comparison of the 1992-3 and 1996-8 data can provide only crude indications of magnitude.

¹⁸ Note of Dissent by Basudev Ray, 25 July 2000, in *Manisana*, pp. 175, 178-9. This source estimated total advertising spend in India in 2000 at Rs 10,000 crores or more than US \$2 billion. David Page and William Crawley, *Satellites over South Asia* (New Delhi: Sage, 2001), pp. 101-02, are less gloomy about print. They put print's share of Indian advertising in 1997 at 61 per cent and television's at 26 per cent.

¹⁹ *Manisana*, p. 62. N. Bhaskar Rao of the Centre for Media Studies had the same view. *Organiser*, 8 December 2002, p. 19: 'the more people watch TV, the more they read newspapers'.

²⁰ Kirk Johnson, *Television and Social Change in Rural India* (New Delhi: Sage, 2000), p. 105.

The *Manisana Report* did not conclude that television heralded catastrophe for newspapers. Rather, it recommended wage rises, which, claimed a representative of the newspaper proprietors, was “beyond the capacity of the industry to pay” and “can threaten the continued existence of the industry”.²¹

The appearance of the *Report of the Wage Boards* captures something of the spirit of the soft pink state that Nehru and his associates established in the 1950s. Many of those mechanisms were becoming irrelevant in 1990s, partly because they had been ineffective. The state apparatus of the 1950s, bolted onto the colonial machine it inherited, was good at setting up institutions, producing reports and laying down laws. Implementation and enforcement, however, proved more difficult. A number of newspapers would have had no intention of implementing the Manisana wage awards, just as they had managed to avoid implementing those of its predecessor, the Bachawat award of 1989 (see below, pp. 141–3). “The creativity of managements”, Ammu Joseph wrote, “in thinking up ways to bypass statutory wages and to avoid legal responsibilities towards permanent employees is truly amazing”.²² The Manisana Wage Board had, after all, taken five-and-half years to submit its report, delays that were felt to benefit proprietors.²³

Though newspapers had still to live with the system of wage boards and the rules of the Registrar of Newspapers, they increasingly adapted to the faster-moving requirements of capitalism. By 2001, two had become genuinely public companies, listed on the Mumbai Stock Exchange, and in June 2002, the Government of India removed the ban on foreign investment in newspapers, which had been in force since 1955.

The new guidelines permitted up to 26 per cent of a company to be owned by foreigners, but at least 51 per cent of the equity had to be held by a single Indian shareholder, and three-quarters of the board of directors and editorial employees had to be Indians. Permission for such investment would be granted only after scrutiny “by the Information & Broadcasting Ministry on the basis of inter-ministerial consultation with the Ministry of Home Affairs and other interested ministries as may be required”.²⁴ To international media investors, in a time of advertising decline, this was not an invitation to a banquet. Till May 2003, no foreign investment had arrived.²⁵

²¹ Note of Dissent by Manoj K. Sonthalia, no date, in *Manisana*, p. 144.

²² Ammu Joseph, *Women in Journalism: Making News* (New Delhi: Konark, 2000), p. 108.

²³ *Manisana*, p. 152.

²⁴ *HIE*, 30 November 2002, p. 11.

²⁵ *Business Standard*, 15 May 2003, quoting Ravi Shankar Prasad, Minister for Information and Broadcasting, in the Rajya Sabha (www.business-standard.com/archives/2003/feb/50250203.048.asp).

The question of foreign investment in newspapers revealed divisions among proprietors. The Indian Newspaper Society (INS), representing many Indian-language newspapers, opposed it: "The foreign investor can always control policies and content", the president, P. G. Pawar of *Sakal*, the Marathi daily, responded on one occasion.²⁶ He was quoted more colourfully in *India Today*: "If there are more concessions [to foreign investors], I won't be surprised. We have a tradition of traitors". K. K. Katyal of the *Hindu* saw imperialism on the horizon: "'Welcome back East India Company!'" he began an account. "That, in effect, is the spirit and import of the Union Cabinet's decision ..."²⁷

Among Indian-language newspapers, the most fervent supporter was *Dainik Jagran*, and its owner-editor and BJP member of the Rajya Sabha, Narendra Mohan (1934–2002) (see pp. 150, 154–5).²⁸ Lined up with *Dainik Jagran* was the flourishing *India Today*, and two faltering organizations, the *Pioneer* and the Indian Express group. Various reasons explain the positions. *Jagran* and *India Today* looked for capital and technology to continue to expand; the *Pioneer* and Indian Express group looked for capital to survive. The *Hindu* and *Times of India* opposed foreign investment with ideological arguments about jeopardizing the national interest, but their adversaries alleged they were wedded to the cosy life of the protected Indian market and feared competition. Indian-language newspapers feared that large and burgeoning publications, driven by foreign capital and imported technology, would capture most of the advertising revenue. The latter fear had particular substance, since evidence from elsewhere suggested that once mass advertising from major consumer industries becomes a chief factor in newspaper finance, only the leading newspaper and perhaps one other are likely to survive.

The slight loosening of the foreign-investment rules was simply a first step. Though foreign investors did not rush into partnerships with Indian publications in 2002 and 2003, further relaxation of restrictions, or an increase in global advertising expenditure, will make investment in Indian publications more attractive in future. Emphasis on foreign investment will also hasten the day when a number of Indian newspapers will become public companies, listed on the Mumbai Stock Exchange, in order to raise the capital to expand, take over others or avoid being taken over themselves. The *khadi dhoti* is being elbowed aside by the checkered coat.

²⁶ *Printing Times*, May–June 2002, pp. 18–19.

²⁷ *HIE*, 6 July 2002, p. 12.

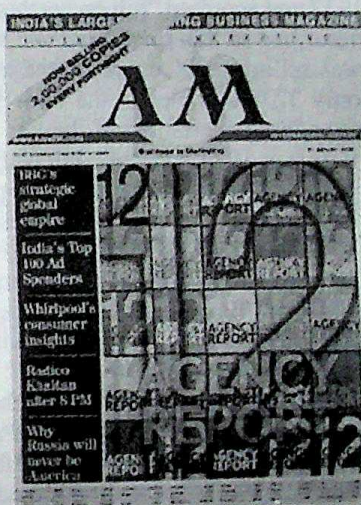
²⁸ He died of a post-operative infection in September. *Hindu*, 21 September 2002 (www.hinduonnet.com/2002/09/21/stories/2002092202661300.htm).

Advertising and Marketing: The New Economy

If the *Report of the Wage Boards* was the rumpled *dhoti* of Nehruvian India, *A&M*'s glazed paper and bright colour were the checkered sports coat of the bustling business tycoon. *A&M* an abbreviation of "advertising and marketing," claimed to be "India's largest selling business magazine", itself a boast symptomatic of new needs and styles.²⁹ The magazine covered the process that Indian governments struggle both to control and unleash: expanding capitalism.

A&M's issue of 31 January 2002 contained the magazine's 12th annual report on the Indian advertising industry. It suggested that the business of India's major advertising agencies grew by about 24 per cent in the previous year to produce an advertising expenditure of Rs 8,500 crore or about US \$1.9 billion.³⁰ From 1990, the advertising industry never grew at less than 17 per cent a year. (See Table C and pp. 58–60). As the *Manisana Report* noted, even if television increased its *share* of advertising revenue, the *size* of the cake—and therefore newspapers' revenues—grew annually.³¹

In the same issue as *A&M*'s advertising survey for 2000–01 was a full-page advertisement for *Pudhari*, a Marathi daily (circ. 177,000, *ABC January-June 2001*) based in Kolhapur, a provincial town, once a princely state, 280 kilometres south of Mumbai. A newspaper had three reasons to advertise in *A&M*: to inform marketers of its advantages in the hope of attracting advertisements; to oblige the publishers of *A&M* in the hope of future favourable treatment; and to allow the proprietor of the newspaper to enjoy a moment of vanity. *Pudhari* informed *A&M*'s readers that it had led a fund-raising drive among its readers to build a hospital at Siachen in Kashmir where the Pakistani and Indian armies face each other at altitudes of 5,000 metres. Two members of the owning family were pictured with the Defence Minister and two senior soldiers



²⁹ *A&M* went out of business in the first half of 2002.

³⁰ *A&M*, 31 January 2002, pp. 3, 19–21. This is to equate a "billion" with 1,000 million.

³¹ *Manisana*, p. 62.

at the opening ceremony. The managing director reminded potential advertisers that the newspaper was based in an “eternally prosperous region” surrounded by generous readers who constituted “the progressive markets that his newspaper caters to”. *Pudhari* described itself as “the leader in the leading market”.³²

In 2001, the proprietors of a small-town Indian-language daily found it desirable to promote their national services in a national marketing magazine. They and their newspaper were acting as a “hinge” (see p. 131), creating an idea of India and connecting that idea to their region and their region to the Indian state. The example captures a number of dimensions of the newspaper revolution.

The Jadhav family had been involved with *Pudhari* from its founding in 1937 and acquired “full ownership” in 1944.³³ Like other family enterprises described in this book, *Pudhari* strolled along placidly for many years. It was selling 6,000 copies in the mid-1960s, 20,000 in the mid-1970s, and only 32,000 copies in the mid-1980s.³⁴ Its growth corresponds with the expanding capitalism of the late 1980s and the “liberalization” of 1991. Between 1984 and 1991 circulation doubled, and in two years, between 1991 and 1993, it rose nearly 50 per cent from 67,000 to 100,000 copies a day. Between 1997 and 2001, it rose again by nearly 50 per cent to 177,000.³⁵

As *Pudhari*’s self-promotion in *A&M* indicates, proprietors recognized that they had to grow to survive and that national advertisers were essential to growth. Proprietors also aimed to enjoy the fruits of ownership and influence by flaunting photos with the Defence Minister at the “world’s highest battlefield”.

The uniting of the nation and the region characterizes prosperous Indian-language newspapers. Although *Pudhari* is a Marathi-language newspaper, nothing could be more *national* than to help the Indian army in its war in Kashmir. At the same time, the advertisement in *A&M* made much of the local populace: the managing director stressed that “the generosity of his readers makes all the difference to the progressive markets that his newspapers caters to”. This tidily summarizes “bourgeois nationalism”: the newspaper, as the vehicle for the market, unites dedicated local readers with the “Indian nation” (see pp. 7–9, 131–3, 218).

The newspaper revolution has not been a one-way street to prosperity for those who own newspapers. Indeed, media ownership probably offers a more insecure future than it did 30 years ago. The tendency towards consolidation, which has characterized English-language newspaper

³² *A&M*, 31 January 2002, p. 27.

³³ *Press and Advertisers’ Year Book, 1975* (New Delhi: INFA, 1975), p. 112a [hereafter *PAYB* + year].

³⁴ *PAYB*, for 1965, 1975 and 1985.

³⁵ *ABC January-June* for relevant years.

TABLE C: Advertising Expenditure, 1990-1 to 2000-01

Year	No. of agencies participating	Gross income (million Rs)	Capitalized billings (crores Rs)	Annual growth of participating agencies (%)
1990-1	n.a.	—	930.9	17.1
1991-2	n.a.	—	1161.5	25.2
1992-3	111	—	1585.6	36.5
1993-4	131	—	2220.1	37.4
1994-5	149	—	3501.3	49.5
1995-6	143	—	4218.6	30.4
1996-7	120	—	3905.8	22.4
1997-8	131	7760.5	5331.0	17.9
1998-9	101	9146.2	6100.5	17.9
1999-2000	89	10253.4	6839.0	24.8
2000-01	100	12753.6	8506.7	23.5

Sources: As for Table 3.1, p. 58 and A&M, 31 December 1999, 15 September 2000, 31 January 2002.

Note: The annual percentage increase is based only on the returns from those organizations that participated in the survey in both the relevant years.

industries around the world for the past 50 years, began to reveal itself in India by 2002.

For these calculations, the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) provides the vital figures. Founded in 1948 by newspapers, advertisers and advertising agencies to verify circulation figures, the Audit Bureau provided until 1970 virtually the only way to estimate how many people saw a particular newspaper and therefore how valuable an advertisement in such a newspaper might be (see p. 107). Unlike the Registrar of Newspapers, the Audit Bureau investigates and guarantees the size of the circulation of its member newspapers. They pay a fee to be members of the ABC so that they may then present reliable circulation figures to advertisers. Thus the ABC's membership, and its circulation figures, are only a fraction of those identified, but not verified, by the Registrar.³⁶ The ABC, however, has been a guide for Indian marketers—and a guide to Indian capitalism—for more than 50 years.

In 2002, the ABC's figures indicated that in five of India's 13 major languages, two newspapers—in the case of Telugu, one alone—had become

³⁶ In 1970, readership surveys began, and these have become almost annual events from the mid-1990s (see pp. 64-5).

TABLE D: Daily Newspapers, ABC Members:
Share of Top Two, by Language, 2002

<i>Language</i>	<i>Total daily circ. –ABC members (millions)</i>	<i>Daily circulation of top two ABC members (millions)</i>	<i>% share of top two</i>
Assamese	0.26	0.18 (<i>Asomiya Pratidin, Dainik Janambhoomi</i>)	87%
Bengali	2.14	1.36 (<i>Ananda Bazar Patrika, Bartaman</i>)	63%
English	6.34	3.16 (<i>Times of India, Hindustan Times</i>)	50%
Gujarati	2.61	1.80 (<i>Gujarat Samachar, Sandesh</i>)	69%
Hindi	9.56	3.07 (<i>Dainik Bhaskar, Dainik Jagran</i>)	32%
Kannada	1.17	0.84 (<i>Prajavani, Vijaya Karnataka</i>)	72%
Malayalam	2.36	2.00 (<i>Malayala Manorama, Mathrubhumi</i>)	87%
Marathi	3.40	1.35 (<i>Lokmat, Sakal</i>)	40%
Oriya	0.87	0.33 (<i>Sambad, Dharitri</i>)	38%
Punjabi	0.51	0.44 (<i>Ajit, Jag Bani</i>)	86%
Tamil	1.27	1.10 (<i>Dina Thanthi, Dinamalar</i>)	87%
Telugu	0.90	0.84 (<i>Eenadu—alone</i>)	94%
Urdu	0.20	0.10 (<i>Munsiff, Siasat</i>)	50%

Source: ABC January-June 2002.

overwhelmingly dominant with a share of audited circulation of 80 per cent or more. Just as in North America and Australia, media analysts speak of “a one-paper town”, India may be approaching “one-paper regions”. In Telugu, *Eenadu* had nearly four times the circulation of its nearest rival. Assamese, Malayalam, Punjabi and Tamil have two dominant dailies that control more than 80 per cent of audited circulation. (See Table D). In Bengali, Gujarati and Kannada, the top two dailies had more than 60 per cent of audited circulation.

Each of these stories has its own subtleties. The Tamil press, for example, is much more vigorous and diverse than the Audit Bureau of Circulation figures alone reveal. Indeed, as we know, most newspapers in India are not members of the Audit Bureau; but those that make money from advertising

have to be. The Audit Bureau, along with readership surveys, provide the ways that allow newspapers to sell themselves to advertisers; thriving newspapers cannot survive without advertisers; and for most newspapers, thriving means growing.

Struggles to expand force newspapers to confront questions of finance. Two such questions are especially taxing. First, to raise capital for expansion, should a newspaper issue a public offering of stock on the stock exchange? Most English-speaking media chains elsewhere in the world have become public listed companies, a development that accelerated from the 1960s.³⁷ For newspaper proprietors, convinced that expansion is essential for survival, the prospect of attracting capital is tempting. The risk, however, is to lose control of one's family company or at least to become subject to interference and scrutiny from outsiders. In India by 2002, only two newspapers had floated shares—*Mid-day*, the English daily of Mumbai, and the Gujarati daily *Sandesh*.³⁸ On the strength of the experience elsewhere, however, it was highly likely that others would follow.

The concerns of A&M magazine captured two other aspects of the changing nature of Indian media. The first is the importance given to attempts to gauge the size and quality of markets. Advertisers want to promote their products to people who can and will buy them. Advertising agencies need to know the most appropriate publication for the product they have been hired to promote. The Registrar of Newspapers for India simply collects numbers submitted by publishers; the Audit Bureau takes this process a step further by authenticating circulation. But advertising agencies want more accurate breakdowns of the wealth, location and number of people in the audience. The changes in economic policy since 1991 have provided a powerful impetus to market research.³⁹

From 1995, two rival groups surveyed the audiences for Indian media (see below, pp. 214–5). Each presented itself to advertisers and agencies as the reliable means by which to make judgements about how to spend an advertising budget. And each new survey offered something for newspaper proprietors to cling to. The Indian Readership Survey of 1998 (IRS-98), for example, estimated that the Tamil daily *Dina Thanthi* had eight readers for every copy, a delicious figure that made *Thanthi* the best-read newspaper in the country.⁴⁰ In Kolkata, the National Readership Survey in 1999 (NRS-

³⁷ Ben Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly*, 5th ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), p. 73.

³⁸ *Mid-day* floated early in 2001. The promoters retained about 70 per cent of the shares. Email messages from Somesh Kapai, Mid-Day Multimedia Ltd, 9 and 10 April 2002. *Sandesh* had floated somewhat earlier. Its promoters retained 74 per cent of the shares. See the Mumbai Stock Exchange website for company details (www.bseindia.com/shareholding). I am grateful to Naresh Khanna for help on these points.

³⁹ For example, I. Natarajan, *India Market Demographics Report, 1998* (New Delhi: National Council of Applied Economic Research, 1998).

⁴⁰ B. Bhaskar Rao, "The Newspapers Scene 1998: Miles to Go", *Vidura*, vol. 36, no. 1 (January-March 1999), p. 34. *Hindu*, 19 October 1998, p. 14.

99) showed the *Telegraph* as the leading English-language daily; but the rival survey, IRS-98, showed the *Statesman* as the most read English daily in the region.⁴¹ The survey rivalry continued. The National Readership Survey, backed by newspapers and the Audit Bureau, highlighted an additional 17 million newspaper readers in its findings in 2002. But the Indian Readership Survey, supported by a group of advertising agencies, in April 2003 drew attention to sharp declines in magazine readership and found that "Cable & Satellite scores over other media".⁴²

The fascination with surveys and data resulted from the desperation of advertising agencies to have something concrete on which to base campaigns on behalf of advertisers. Yet everyone acknowledged that the diversity of India's languages, the cultural peculiarities that went with each and the fact that 70 per cent of the population lived in the countryside, made accurate surveying enormously difficult.⁴³

This aspect pointed to the subtleties of language use, depending on the audience a publication was addressing. *A&M* had its own style of English and a special interest in the distinctive cultures of India's regions and their languages. The magazine, and others like it, were vehicles for change in the use of language. The English of India's English-language magazines increasingly picked up American patterns and turns of phrase. Aroon Purie, founder of *India Today*, was an admirer of *Time*. The Victorian prose of the Indian bureaucracy and the English-language daily newspapers of the past was being replaced.

Similar developments were going on in Indian languages (see below, pp. 100–2). An example that was both tiny yet telling was the Hindi daily *Dainik Jagran*'s rejection of the convention of placing a dot under certain consonants in the Devanagari script to represent sounds associated with Urdu (Perso-Arabic-derived) words, notably "zuh". This editorial policy could be interpreted as a strong political statement, which moulded language usage by suggesting to readers that the most acceptable way to pronounce a word like Muzaffarnagar was "Mu-ja-par-nagar".⁴⁴ This was not only homogenizing languages, as mass media have done throughout the world, but also reflecting the political preferences of the proprietors, one of whose leading members in 2001 was a BJP-supported Member of Parliament.

⁴¹ *Mid-Day*, 23 April 1999 (www.mid-day.com). *Frontline*, 8 October 1999, pp. 105–06.

⁴² "NRS 2002—Press Release", April 2002, www.auditbureau.org/nri/highl.htm for the National Readership Survey, and "C&S closing gap on terrestrial TV," 30 April 2003, www.indiantelevision.com/special/y2k3/firs2002.htm, for the Indian Readership Survey. The rivalry between the two surveys led to calls for a truce and a single, unified survey. "NFO-MBL to exist IRS; Hansa Research Group likely to take charge", 16 April 2003, www.agencyfaqs.com/www1/news/stories/2003/04/16/6055.html.

⁴³ Natarajan, *India Market Demographics*, p. 25.

⁴⁴ Peter Friedlander, Robin Jeffrey and Sanjay Seth, "'Subliminal Charge': How Hindi-Language Newspaper Expansion Affects India", *Media International Australia*, No. 100 (August 2001), pp. 158–9.

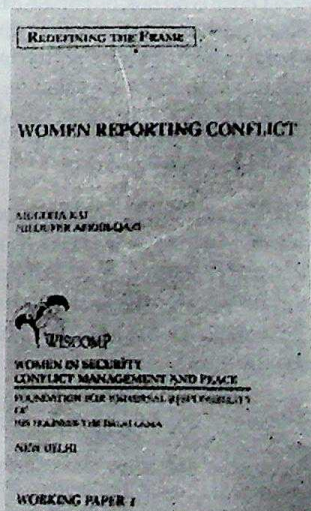
The effects of mass media are both predictable (e.g., local variations of language will be overrun by standardized forms disseminated by mass media) and open (e.g., the preference of influential individuals may determine which forms prevail).

Newspaper consumption, driven by capitalism, yet influenced by proprietors' politics and predilections, affects people and society. No one is more aware of this than the people who research the markets and create the advertisements. "Whirlpool Whitemagic", A&M wrote about a washing machine, "has become a Rs 200-crore brand in just three years—by probing deep into the Indian consumer's mind ... by delving deep into consumer psyche".⁴⁵ In the same issue of A&M, *Pudhari*, the Marathi daily, offered keen understanding of its regions—southern Maharashtra, northern Karnataka and Goa—to all wise advertisers seeking to penetrate "the progressive markets that this newspaper caters to".⁴⁶

Capitalism and technology drive India's newspaper revolution and open up a range of possibilities. To begin with, the process creates mass markets, propagates consumerism, expands the possibilities for ordinary people to publicize their stories and foreshadows a concentration of newspaper ownership. And, in addition to these, newspaper technology brings still other possibilities, both exhilarating and dark.

The Potentials of New Technology: Both Ugly and Beautiful

If the *Manisana Report* was a grey-white dhoti and A&M a checkered sports coat, *Women Reporting Conflict* was khadi ethnic chic.⁴⁷ As a publication, it showed what the new technology could do when powered by able enthusiasts. Its cover of textured, handmade card was elegant. The black-and-white photographs were clear; the printing was sharp; the logo crisp and well-designed; the paper inside was white and heavy enough so that ink didn't show through to the reverse side. Its 34 pages were everything that the *Manisana Report* was not. *Women Reporting Conflict* was not an expensive production, and the ideas it presented have nothing to do with either



⁴⁵ A&M, 31 January 2002, pp. 4–5.

⁴⁶ A&M, 31 January 2002, p. 27.

⁴⁷ Mugdha Rai and Niloufer Afridi-Qazi, *Women Reporting Conflict* (New Delhi: Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace [WISCOMP], 1999).

official government pronouncements or celebrations of marketing and Indian capitalism.

Women Reporting Conflict illustrated two important themes in the way in which media change is changing India. First, it suggested the potential for using print and literacy for activities which the state may not support or approve. Second, it showed the potential of the new technology to work effectively for small groups of people on low budgets.

But if the possibilities suggested by *Women Reporting Conflict* seem inspiring, it needs to be emphasized that they are not the only possibilities. The only values the technology has are those intrinsic to the fact that it arises from the hunger of capitalism for new products and markets. The technology itself can be used to promote every cause imaginable.

Indeed, in 2002, pamphleteering was one of the devices used to power anti-Muslim rioting in Gujarat after the murder of dozens of Hindu religious enthusiasts in the burning of railway carriages by a Muslim mob. "A two-page pamphlet in Gujarati printed on blue-coloured paper", reported the *Indian Express* from Ahmedabad, was "doing the rounds of the state". Published by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), it called on Hindus to "save our country by boycotting Muslims economically and socially." According to the *Indian Express*, the pamphlet continued:

Traitors and terrorists are coming by the truckloads. They will kill your security guards and enter your bungalows. They will murder you in your drawing rooms and bedrooms.

Those who talk of Hindu-Muslim unity are only maligning their own religion. There can be no talk of equality between Hindus and Muslims. They do not consider Bharat as their motherland. Hindu-Muslim unity is a farce. Communal harmony and brotherhood is all a drama.

In Godhra, they have killed Ram sevaks [servants of Lord Ram] ... Godhra was just one incident. It was just a trailer, the real picture is still to start. Many Godhras will be repeated.⁴⁸

Such pamphlets could be produced in the past. But new technology made it faster, cheaper and easier to manufacture and, using email and the web, to distribute them to Gujarati-speakers everywhere. Close to two-thirds of all adult Indians—and 70 per cent of Gujarat's people—were now able to read. By early April 2002, one group inquiring into the riots collected 11 such documents.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *Indian Express*, 13 April 2002 (Janyala Sreenivas), www.indian-express.com/full-story.php?content_id=795.

⁴⁹ People's Union for Civil Liberties, Baroda and Shanti Abhiyan, "An Overview of the Role of Print and Electronic Media in Baroda during the Gujarat Carnage," Summary of Pamphlets Being Circulated, 5 April 2002, <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/GUJARATDEVELOPMENT/files>. I am grateful to Ammu Joseph for this and other references. See also Batuk Vora in the weekly magazine *Mainstream*, an article dated 9 April 2002, sent to me by email from Ammu Joseph, 20 April 2002. For attitudes of Gujarati newspaper proprietors, see Robin Jeffrey, "Media Revolution and 'Hindu Politics' in North India, 1982-99," *Himal*, July 2001, p. 39.

Women Reporting Conflict was also a document that no Indian official would have been especially keen to encourage in the aftermath of an ugly, jingoistic little war. It was the report of two discussions convened by a small non-government organization (NGO) in New Delhi in 1999, immediately after the Kargil war in Kashmir between India and Pakistan. The aim was to discuss the role of gender in the coverage of conflict and, in particular, the role of women reporters in the covering of war. It involved a Pakistani participant who wrote half the report. The fact that the proceedings of the discussion could be written and published within a few months of the event underlines the ease and power of new printing technology (below, pp.). The technology represents the same combination of computers and photo-based reproduction that, on a larger scale, enabled the newspaper revolution to take off in the 1980s.

Sporadic pamphleteering is as old as the printing press. Is there any reason to believe it has greater potential to influence people today than in the past? It still lacks the mass distribution that makes the regular daily newspaper such a relentless keeper of time and definer of the acceptable—the sort of metronome and task-master that Marshall McLuhan alluded to (see below, pp. 39–47). Pamphlets, email lists and web pages do none of these. The combined circulation of the two largest newspapers in Gujarati, which we shall look at below, exceeded 1.7 million copies a day at the end of 2002. Against the weight of the great capitalist newspaper and media chains, the most inspired pamphlet or website seems like a field-hand with a scythe standing beside a combine-harvester. One possibility is that productions, even web-based productions, of the kind that *Women Reporting Conflict* or the Gujarati pamphlet represent, are no more than ethnic chic or polemical anger, no different from things that the well-meaning and genteel, or the politically enraged have always been able to do.

But the new technology opens up other possibilities. Because it is relatively cheap and easy, it is available to larger sections of people than was possible with the old printing methods. With the latter, a potential publication needed a print shop, a willing printer and probably a downpayment if it were to be mass-produced. Today, a potential publication needs only a personal computer, an ink-jet printer and a photocopier. Even before we consider the added possibilities of the Internet, these more affordable requirements mean that print is more difficult for government and authority to control. The potential for small things to acquire enormous lives of their own—for the web to be the god of small things—is greater now than ever before. That potential will tantalize, and perhaps torment, anyone concerned with running governments, selling entertainment or propagating messages.

Women Reporting Conflict focused on women. Though women make up just under half of India's population, they do not control half the wealth

or power. There are fewer than half a dozen women near the top of the Indian newspaper industry.⁵⁰ The publication of *Women Reporting Conflict* illustrated how the technology allows groups who otherwise might have difficulty in publicizing their stories to disseminate those stories. There is no reason to believe that mainstream Indian newspapers would have been particularly keen to focus on “another women’s story”—and one that might have been deemed “unpatriotic”—in the aftermath of the Kargil war (for a similar example, see pp. 170–1).

The wide availability of effective printing technology acquires even greater significance when we consider the growth of literacy in India in the 1990s. The 1991 census put the number of literate Indians at 52 per cent of the population over the age of seven—roughly 352 million people. The census of 2001 calculated the rate of literacy at 65 per cent of the population over the age of seven—562 million people. To add 210 million readers to the potential audience must rank as a publisher’s dream.⁵¹

A significant portion of those 210 million additional literates were Dalits, “ex”-Untouchables or “Scheduled Castes”, who make up 15 per cent of India’s population. Indeed, if the same rate of increase in literacy applied to Dalits as to the population as a whole, Dalit literacy would have risen from 37 per cent to close to 50 per cent of Dalits over the age of seven—more than 60 million people (below, p. 160). Yet the number of Dalits in influential editorial positions on Indian newspapers remains feebly small.⁵² One of the possibilities of the new media technology is that it will enable an increasingly assertive, though small, Dalit middle class to overcome some of the difficulties of poverty, division and dispersal noted in this book (below, pp. 162, 164). From the United States in 1999, one such person wrote to an e-mail list:

I am an entirely different human being than the one who grew up in India. Ironically here, in the US, both me and the caste [H]indus were finally on an equal footing. We were both outsiders! It thrilled me no end that the minute details on which most Indians based their prejudice were entirely lost on Americans.⁵³

⁵⁰ Joseph, *Women in Journalism*, especially pp. 208–11. *Sunday Mid-Day* did a list of the “50 most powerful people in Indian media”. There appear to be only two women—the vice-president of the *Hindustan Times*, a member of the owning family, and the gossip columnist and potboiler writer, Shobha De. Neither has much association with Indian-language media. (www.mid-day.com/smd/play/2003/april/50385.htm).

⁵¹ *Census of India 1991*, Series 1, *India*, Paper-1 of 1991, *Provisional Population Totals*, pp. 59, 61. *Census of India 2001*, Series 1, *India*, Paper-1 of 2001, *Provisional Population Totals*, pp. 115, 128. It is worth noting, in the context of this discussion, the vast superiority in printing and production of the 2001 version over the 1991 version.

⁵² Robin Jeffrey, “[Not] Being There: Dalits and India’s Newspapers”, *South Asia*, vol. 24, no 2 (2001), pp. 225–38.

⁵³ Posting from Manu Kodian, 11 May 1999. I am grateful to Susan Chaplin of La Trobe University for this reference.

Similarly, conferences calling for renewed efforts to abolish inequality commanded more serious coverage in national media.⁵⁴ And the Internet allowed attempts at “networking dalits and their organisations” through something called the “Ambedkar Directory”, which was in formation in March 2002.⁵⁵ Yet mass-circulation publications with a Dalit focus did not exist. Mass circulation implied mass *market*, and 150 million Dalits still did not appear to constitute either a clearly reachable advertising segment or significant purchasing power. Perhaps no single calculation better illustrates how capitalism has propelled India’s newspaper revolution.

Women Reporting Conflict was prompted by the Kargil war in Kashmir from May to July 1999. This small war has often been described as India’s “first television war”. Experienced journalists talked about the media as “a force multiplier” and in the English-language press journalists strove for patriotism.⁵⁶ What this meant for Indian-language publications is not clear, though their audiences were affected if we are to judge by *Pudhari’s* readers and their sponsorship of a hospital at the front line of the nation’s conflicts. What is beyond doubt is that the 1999 war was more widely known to India’s people than any previous war.

The spread of print and other media penetration does not necessarily make people more thoughtful and reflective. Indeed, new media have the capacity to inflame far larger of numbers than could be reached in a pre-literate, word-of-mouth, pre-television culture, as the pamphlet circulating in Gujarat during the riots of 2002 suggests. The new small-scale media technologies open up possibilities whose outcomes cannot be predicted. They make it more feasible for small, poor organizations to publicize their concerns and messages, just as they make it easier to disseminate literature intended to make people hate each other.⁵⁷

What Does the Newspaper Revolution Mean?

The question of how people are affected by greater exposure to more diverse kinds of media provokes various answers. Arvind Rajagopal in his stimulating book, *Politics after Television*, contends that north India

⁵⁴ *IT*, 11 February 2002, p. 16, for an account of a large conference on Dalit issues in Bhopal.

⁵⁵ The initiative was based at a website: www.ambedkar.org. Internet messages, 28 March 2002.

⁵⁶ Rita Manchanda, *Reporting Conflict: A Radical Critique of the Mass Media by Indian and Pakistani Journalists* (Kathmandu: South Asian Forum for Human Rights, 2001).

⁵⁷ Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, *A Social History of the Media* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), p. 11, ask the same questions and have no definitive answer: do media changes “favour democracy or dictatorship? ... encourage empathy with others or ... encourage withdrawal ... destroy communities or create new kinds of community ...?”

has acquired a “split public”—split between an elite that reads the English-language press and a substantial but different “public” who read the Hindi-language press. News in the latter “was written quite differently from English news”. Rajagopal points out that Hindi-language newspapers were often criticized for “their inability to imitate the English language press”. But this, he argues, is to ignore “the specific cultural and political conditions of Hindi language news production”.⁵⁸ Hindi media use “forms of expression, principally religious in character, that were excluded from the English language media”. In “fluent and racy prose”, Hindi-language newspapers transmitted different information in a different way from English-language newspapers.⁵⁹ Rajagopal suggests that Hindu-chauvinist politics start with advantages in Hindi-language media because such politics are working with vocabulary, allusions and images that are part of the cultural landscape. Until those who have other views—Marxist, secular, liberal or whatever—about how India should be governed find a powerful vocabulary in Hindi to expound their ideas, the mass politics, which grow with mass markets and the newspaper revolution, will tilt in favour of Hindu-chauvinist exponents. Such tilts no doubt can be overcome, but the contest will require skill, ideas and imagination.

To what extent can one language explore and do justice to the culture of another? Rajagopal argues that “the monolithic picture of the [Ayodhya] campaign [of 1992] in the English language press became the active counterpart to the more nuanced and variegated narratives in the Hindi press”.⁶⁰ There seems little doubt that in writing about a subject like the birthplace of Lord Rama, Hindi provides a richer set of allusions and nuances than English. Similarly, Hindi in the 1990s no doubt offered a less rich and vivid vocabulary with which to touch people’s hearts in discussions of modern government, particularly “secular” government.

The idea of a “split public” recalls other twin-poled attempts to make sense of the relationship between an all-India (English-knowing) elite and local (regional-language-knowing) masses. Sharad Joshi, organizer of farmers’ movements in the 1980s, posited the distinction between “Bharat” where most of India lived, which was rural and where people used the local language, and “India”, much smaller in number and mostly urban and English-knowing.⁶¹ There are similar echoes of colonial educational debates about whether English or an Indian language was a more effective vehicle by which to transmit western-style ideas.⁶²

⁵⁸ Arvind Rajagopal, *Politics after Television. Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 153.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 160, 166.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁶¹ *Hindustan Times* (Magazine), 21 February 1988, p. 1.

⁶² Nor are such formulations unique to India. Are there not also echoes of Disraeli’s novel, *Sybil, or The Two Nations* (1845)?

Such distinctions are useful up to a point. Yet while there may be various “publics”, many people straddle them—sometimes unconsciously—by winning esteem in both. This book argues that another aspect of the newspaper revolution is the role of proprietors of Indian-language newspapers as “hinges” who link regions to the nation and who have material and emotional interests in fostering “India” as a unity (below, pp. 105, 131–3). Such a role does not rule out ideas of “split publics”; it simply means that some people will aim to work in all of them.

Similarly, in emphasizing the importance of language in the politics of particular cultures, we should not overlook structural characteristics of Indian newspapers. In the 1990s, Hindi newspapers were family businesses, based in regional towns, run to tight budgets, and owned by caste-Hindu families that took a keen interest in their day-to-day conduct. Journalists knew their proprietors’ feelings, and, indeed, many journalists owed their positions to the fact that they wrote in a way that pleased the boss. They were also writing for audiences based close to the scene of the mosque-temple confrontation at Ayodhya.

Rajagopal emphasized “the cultural proximity of journalists to the subject matter and their access to inner modes and meanings”.⁶³ But there is also a question about the quality and training of journalists. It appears that some newspapers in south India and some English-language newspapers tried harder to train the people who worked for them. Training in the Hindi-language press is rare (see below, pp. 157–60). Basic conventions of journalism, such as procedures for fact-checking, are *not* culturally specific; but they need to be taught, explained and enforced, and this costs money. Newspapers should not escape responsibility for training journalists on the plea that careless idiosyncrasy is the essence of local culture.

In pondering the meaning and effects of the newspaper revolution, two areas are worth special scrutiny. The first is the progress of the “Bagdikian scenario” in India. To what extent will national advertisers grow in importance and thereby lead to the emergence of a few overwhelmingly dominant newspaper chains? Second, to what extent will political ideas, other than those of Hindu-chauvinist groups, acquire potency in Hindi-language media?

The entwining of capitalist practice and cultural sensitivity came into focus in the murderous riots in March and April 2002 that followed the massacre at Godhra railway station on 27 February. *Sandesh* is the second largest of the Gujarati dailies and, as we have seen, one of the two Indian newspapers to have listed on the stock exchange. It was accused of being the most provocative of Gujarati newspapers after the Godhra killing. Its proprietor reportedly justified the coverage: “I would defend the Hindu

⁶³ Rajagopal, *Politics*, p. 167.

community at any cost. We have been enough harassed and killed by the Muslims. We have suffered too much. It is time to pay them back".⁶⁴ *Sandesh's* audited circulation for the first six months of 2002 was 757,000, up seven per cent over the previous six months. Its bitter rival *Gujarat Samachar* (see below, p.) grew by three per cent to 1,041,000.⁶⁵ *Gujarat Samachar's* proprietor, dismissing similar charges of provocative coverage, was reported to have said: "We understand the pulse of the masses better than anyone and we always side with their feelings".⁶⁶ Whatever hopes one might invest in the "alternative media" made possible by new technologies, it will be difficult to hear other messages over the relentless drumming of mass media, in this case, the two giants of Gujarati journalism and their 1.76 million copies a day.

The spread of print and capitalism does not guarantee—or preclude—tolerance and wisdom. The outcomes are open and depend on the stances and stamina of individuals, just as much as they do on some irresistible equation generated when human beings are enveloped in a culture of print and mass media. The process is worth studying: those who understand it improve their chances of influencing the results.

⁶⁴ Quoted by Batuk Vora, "Gujarati Print Media: Culprit Second to None", *Mainstream*, 9 April 2002, circulated by NWM-Mumbai@yahoo.com (20 April 2002). For a *Sandesh* front page, see the one reproduced between pp. 148 and 149, which features identification photos of people killed in a bus crash.

⁶⁵ *ABC January-June 2002*.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Vora, "Gujarati Print Media", *Mainstream*, 9 April 2002.

PREFACE

This book combines two delights: newspapers and India. My first job was as a sports writer on a small-town Canadian daily in the early 1960s. I loved it. The first country I lived in after leaving home was India. I loved it too. For the past thirty-five years, I have spent at least a little of each day pondering either India or newspapers, often both.

India's newspaper revolution seemed to me so important – for understanding India's recent past, estimating its future and gauging the consequences of print for peoples and their politics – that I appointed myself chronicler. No one else, so far as I know, had applied for the job. I am not ideally qualified. I am not a linguist in the way that colleagues who study China or Japan are. I have a reading and writing knowledge of Malayalam, the language of India's southwestern state of Kerala, and once I was able to do a Malayalam radio interview with the help of a kindly producer. I speak bus-stand Hindi that is as pat and as limited as the English of many immigrant greengrocers in Melbourne. I know and can write the Devanagari alphabet, and I can decipher one or two other scripts.

This book, however, is not primarily about the content of Indian-language newspapers. Rather, it tries to understand why they grow, who pays for them to grow, who profits from their growth, who produces them and who tries to control them. Much more broadly and tentatively, it speculates about the changes that the coming of newspapers makes on people's lives. To work at these puzzles requires a wide and deep view of India, an inquisitiveness about the role of print in the modern world and a sensitivity to languages. Under this job-description, I think I qualify. I tried to improve my qualifications by writing a series of eleven essays on the press in major Indian languages, which were published in the *Economic and Political Weekly* of Mumbai in January-March 1997. As I hoped, they provoked discussions which allowed me to correct errors and rethink positions. Those essays are different from this book. It was essential for me to write them before I could settle down to the thematic treatment I use here.

Although historians, social scientists and policy-makers rely on newspapers every day, they seldom reflect on the nature of newspapers or their transformations. Though scholars attribute so much importance to the coming of newspapers and books to the making of nationalism and political change in modern Europe, there is a dearth of studies of the European newspaper press in the nineteenth and even the twentieth centuries. India ought not to suffer the same neglect. It thus seemed

worthwhile to try both to take a snapshot of the Indian newspaper industry in the 1990s and to unroll a reel of film into the past to try to explain why the industry looked the way it did.

Three aspects of the book may puzzle readers. First, it concentrates on daily newspapers and merely alludes to magazines. My reason is that dailies have been the essence of the industry in most countries and that most foreign evidence suggests that general-interest magazines, in the face of television, will struggle to survive. Specialist magazines, which began to appear in India in the 1990s for business, and long existed for the movies, may be the means by which magazines survive; but daily newspapers remain, I believe, the essence of India's newspaper revolution, and the book therefore focuses on them. Secondly, I imply that English-language newspapers are excluded from the book. In fact, of course, they are not. I frequently refer to them, partly because English has become an Indian language and partly because the English-language press has been at the centre of the Indian newspaper industry until the period that this book describes. English is there throughout, like Sherlock Holmes' dog that didn't bark. Thirdly, I sometimes jump about in my use of tense. This is because the newspaper industry – the media industry – does not stay still. As a historian and editor fond of neatness, I would like to cast this as a story with an ending; but as a realist, I know that this would be foolish. The statistics change constantly; publications, like people, are born and die. I hope, however, that the larger analysis – about what drives the industry, about the people who own, operate and seek to control it, and about its wider consequences – will prove durable.

The research is based on all the published sources of which I am aware and on more than 250 interviews, the earliest of which dates from 1977. Most, however, were conducted in 1993-4 and 1999 in the course of travels around India which took me from Trivandrum to Jalandhar and Bhavnagar to Cuttack. My gratitude to the newspaper people and others who talked to me is as great as the pleasure I derived from the conversations. Was there ever so enjoyable an enterprise as to talk to Indian newspaper people about Indian newspapers?

I have been undisciplined about the spelling of place names. I have opted on the whole for "Mumbai" and "Chennai" instead of the old "Bombay" and "Madras". But for places in Kerala, I have retained the old spellings because I believe they are more familiar to foreign – and, indeed, many Indian – readers. I have included a conversion table for place names.

A number of people and institutions supported me in this project. An Australian Research Council (ARC) Large Grant allowed me time from teaching in 1996-7 to do much of the writing. Small grants from the ARC and from La Trobe University supported the research at other

times. My colleagues in the Department of Politics at La Trobe University created one of the happiest homes in which a scholar could hope to work.

I have incurred many debts in writing the book. C. B. Karnik at the Audit Bureau of Circulations in Mumbai generously supplied me with ABC materials and general advice, as did his successor, Hormuzd Masani. A. K. Das Gupta at *Eenadu* in Hyderabad got my interviewing program in 1993 off to a purposeful start. Varun Bhide similarly smoothed the way for me at *Sakal* in Pune. This early help was especially valuable because it led to other people, newspapers and ideas. Taliş Polis and Peter Reeves once again read and commented on the entire manuscript in various incarnations and thereby saved me from a number of sins. Ramoji Rao at *Eenadu*, K. M. Mathew at *Malayala Manorama* and K. C. Venugopal at *Mathrubhumi* very kindly organized photographs for me. I am also very grateful for various kinds of help and thoughtfulness to Judith Brett, Liz Byrne, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Susan Chaplin, Marilu Espacio, Anthony Griffith, Russell Hocking, Naresh Khanna, Anthony Low, Judith Mahoney, V. K. Madhavan Kutty, Nella Mete, John Miller, N. Murali, Kate Mustafa, Mrinal Pande, Gyan Pandey, N. Ram, John Robinson, P. K. Roy, P. Sainath, P. B. Sawant, Ambika Srivastava and Tom Weber. Gary Swinton of Monash University drew the maps. Lindsay Howe of La Trobe University improved my photographs.

If newspapers and India are two of my delights, Lesley is the greatest. I thank her for putting up with me and the two lesser rivals.

Melbourne, July 1999

ROBIN JEFFREY

NEW AND OLD PLACE-NAMES

<i>New</i>	<i>Old</i>
Chennai	Madras
Jalandhar	Jullundur
Kochi	Cochin
Kollam	Quilon
Kozhikode	Calicut
Mumbai	Bombay
Pune	Poona
Tiruchchirappali	Trichinopoly
Tirunelveli	Tinnevely
Thiruvananthapuram	Trivandrum
Varanasi	Benares

GLOSSARY

broadsheet	a full-sized newspaper, measuring about 40 x 55 cms (16 x 22 inches)
case	the pigeonholes in which individual letter-forms are kept when type is set by hand
chase	rectangular frame in which type and plates (illustrations) are locked up in preparation for either printing (with a flatbed press) or making a stereo mould (for a rotary press)
Dalit	"oppressed"; term used increasingly from the 1970s to describe "ex"-Untouchables or Scheduled Castes; sometimes used to include low-status, poor people of all castes and religions
district	basic administrative unit under a bureaucrat from the Indian Administrative Service, often called "the Collector", a throwback to British time when the job involved collecting the land revenue (in the 1990s there were more than 400 districts in India)
"emergency"	Mrs Gandhi's 19-month period of dictatorial rule from June 1975 to February 1977, during which censorship was in force
flatbed cylinder press	type of press in which the chase (see above) lies flat

	and a cylinder, around which the paper is wrapped, is rolled over the inked chase
galley	tray holding columns of composed type; the proof taken from such type
Linotype	company which began manufacture in 1890 of machines that cast lines of type from molten metal; the term has become a synonym for mechanical casting of type
lithography	chemical process, invented in 1790s, by which images are transferred from a flat surface – a “stone” – to paper; it works by making some portions of the surface ink-retentive and others ink-repellent; the same process is the basis of offset printing (see below)
Monotype	company which introduced a machine to set individual letters of type from molten metal
offset printing	chemical-based process in which the plate bearing the image does not directly contact the paper; the plate, made by photographing the image to be printed, is wrapped round a drum; the portions of the plate to be printed are sensitized to retain the oil-based ink; thus when ink and water flow, the portions to be printed retain ink, the spinning drum transfers these marks to a second drum – the “blanket” – and it transfers the ink to the web of paper racing through the press.
point size	measurement used in printing; 72 points equal one inch or 2.54 centimetres
rotary press	a press in which the printing surface is wrapped round a cylinder; it thus allows for continuous skeins of paper to be fed through and for greater printing speed
Scheduled Caste	the official term to describe “ex”-Untouchables; see Dalit above
stereo	the process by which a flat page of metal type was made semi-circular for a rotary press; papier mache was pressed against the page of type, bent into a semi-circular shape and then filled with molten metal; the inked metal plate, fitted onto a rotary press, transferred the image to paper
tabloid	a newspaper half the size of a broadsheet; also used of the style of popular, “low-brow” newspapers
taluk, taluka	administrative unit below a district
teleprinter	machine, like a typewriter, that translates typed words for transmission on telegraph lines and prints them out on another teleprinter at their destination

Untouchable

a person belong to one of the scores of castes held by traditional Hinduism to be so polluting as to lie outside the caste system; see Dalit and Scheduled Caste above; India's constitution of 1950 outlawed untouchability

web

roll of paper; modern presses from the 1860s allowed paper to flow through in a continuous, fast-moving skein

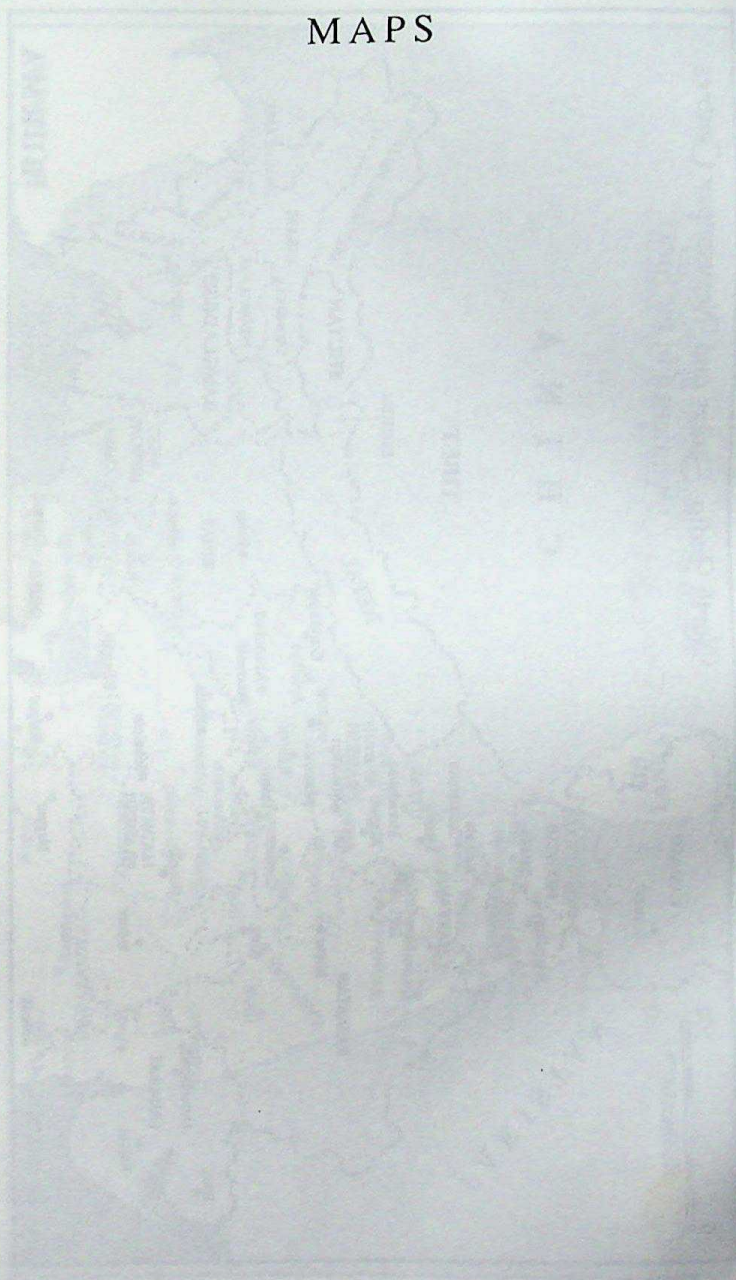
Source: For printing terms. Paul Arthur (ed.), *The E.B. Eddy Handbook of Printing Production* (Hull and Ottawa: E. B. Eddy Company, 1967).

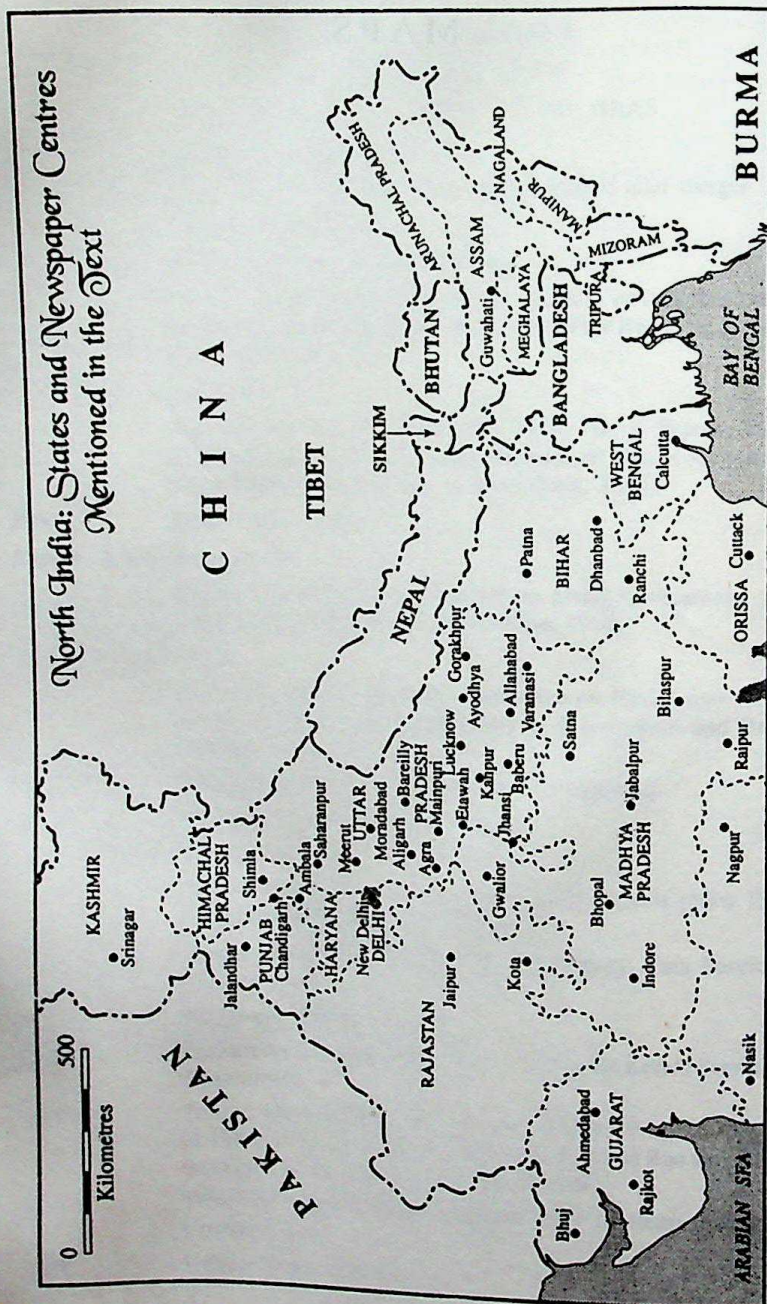
ABBREVIATIONS

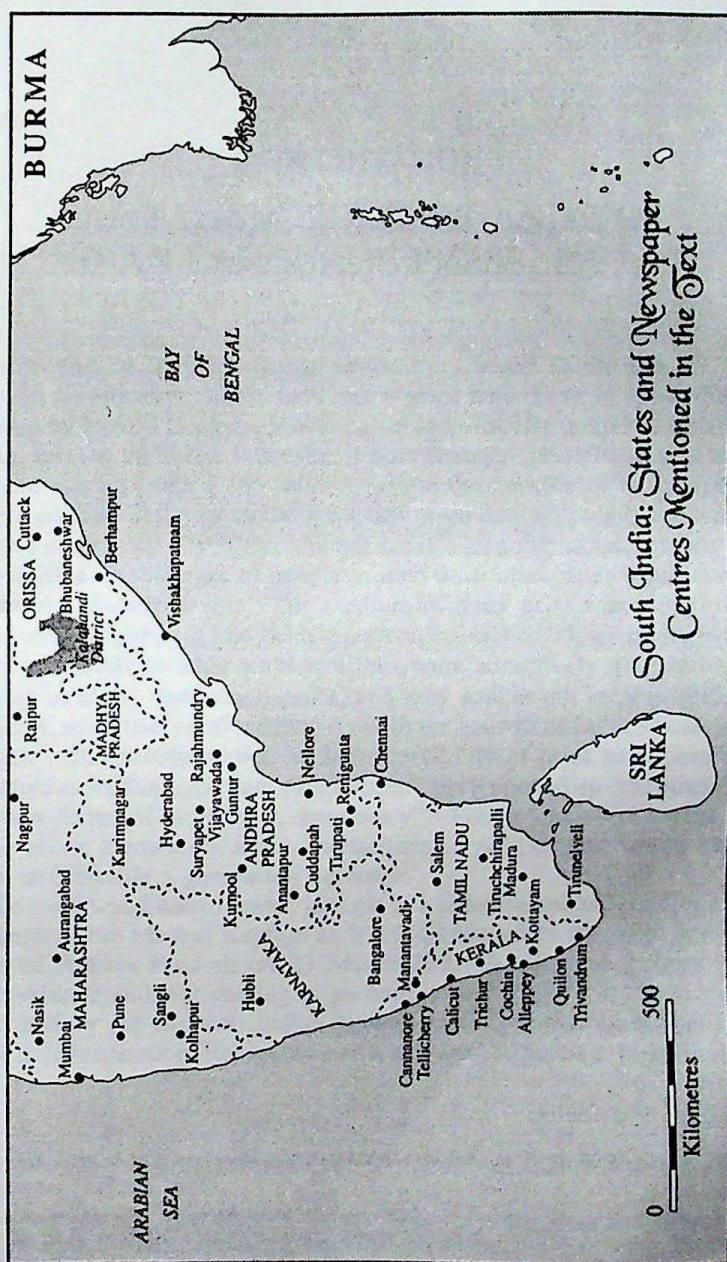
AAAI	Advertising Agencies Association of India, founded 1945
ABC (+ date)	Audit Bureau of Circulations, <i>A Preliminary List of Circulations Certified for the Audit Period Ended [date]</i> (Bombay: Audit Bureau of Circulations, [date])
AIADMK	All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Tamil political party, formed by actor M.G. Ramachandran and associated after his death with Jayalalitha
ASNE	American Society of Newspaper Editors
BCCL	Bennett, Coleman and Company Ltd, owners of the <i>Times of India</i> and other newspapers
BI	<i>Business India</i> , fortnightly
CUP	Cambridge University Press
CWMG	<i>Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi</i>
DAVP	Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity
DMK	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, a Tamil political party that originated with C. N. Annadurai and associated with K. Karunanidhi since the 1970s
EPW	<i>Economic and Political Weekly</i> , Mumbai
HIE	<i>Hindu International Edition</i> , weekly
IENS	Indian and Eastern Newspaper Society (dropped "Eastern" in 1988)
IMRB	Indian Market Research Bureau, formed by Hindustan Thomson Associates 1971
INFA	Indian News and Features Agency
INS	Indian Newspaper Society (since 1988)
IRS	Indian Readership Survey, 1995 and 1998 (ORG, MARG)
IT	<i>India Today</i> , weekly from 1997; previously fortnightly
MARG	Marketing and Research Group, formed 1983 by former IMRB employee
MRUC	Media Research Users' Council
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly, the legislature of an Indian state
MP	Member of Parliament, the national legislature
NRS	National Readership Survey
	I 1970 ORG
	II 1978 ORG and IMRB

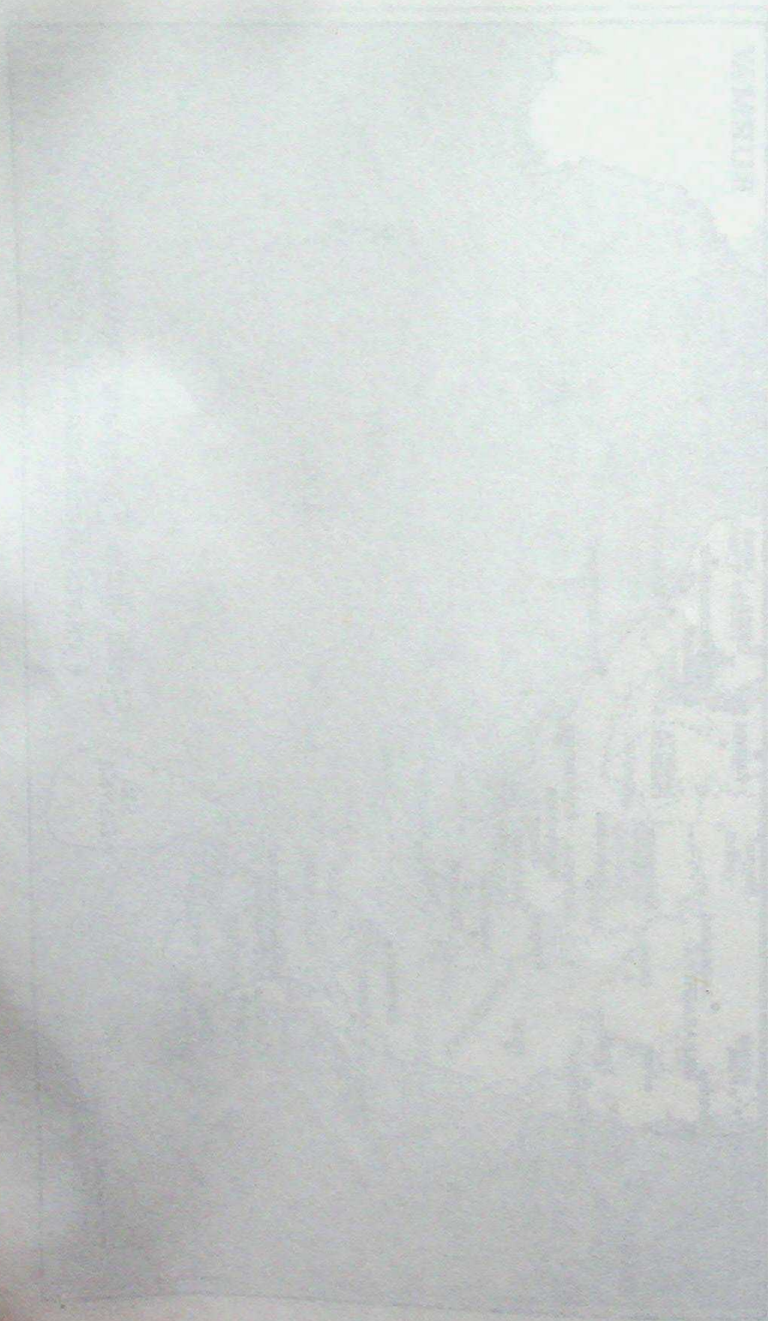
- III 1984 IMRB
- IV 1990 IMRB and MediaSearch
- V 1995 IMRB, MARG, MODE
- VI 1997 IMRB, MARG, MODE, MRAS
- ORG Operations Research Group
- ORG-MARG India's largest market research group, formed after merger
- OUP Oxford University Press
- PAYB *Press and Advertisers' Year Book*
- PII *Press in India* + date (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, annual report since 1957 of the Registrar of Newspapers for India)
- Press Commission, 1954*
Report of the Press Commission, 1954, Part 1: Report; Part 2: J. Natarajan, History of Indian Journalism; Part 3: Appendices (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1954)
- PTI Press Trust of India
- Report...Small Newspapers*
Report of the Inquiry Committee on Small Newspapers, 1965 (New Delhi: Ministry of Information, 1966)
- Report...Fact-Finding*
Report of the Fact-Finding Committee on Newspaper Economics, 1975 (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1975)
- RIND Research Institute for Newspaper Development
- RNI Registrar of Newspapers for India
- Second Press Commission*
Report of the Second Press Commission, 2 vols (New Delhi: Controller of Publications, 1982)
- SOI *Statistical Outline of India* + year (Bombay: Tata Services + relevant year)
- SW *Statesman Weekly*, Calcutta
- TCS Travancore Confidential Section – files in the Kerala Secretariat, Trivandrum
- TDP Telugu Desam Party, founded for Andhra Pradesh elections of 1983; led by the Telugu film star N.T. Rama Rao and strongly supported at the 1983 election by *Eenadu*
- Tol Times of India, English-language daily of Bennett Coleman Company Ltd
- UNI United News of India

MAPS









1

INTRODUCTION

CAPITALISM, POLITICS AND THE
INDIAN-LANGUAGE PRESS, 1977-99

A revolution in Indian-language newspapers began in the late 1970s. Though all-absorbing to the men and women who drove it, it was little noticed by India's English-speaking elite and virtually unknown outside India. In raw numbers, however, it was striking. In 1976 if you had divided among India's 755 million people the number of newspapers produced each day, you would have had more than 80 people clustered around each copy. By 1996, though India's population had grown to 935 million, the number of people around each newspaper would have fallen to just over twenty.¹ The medium of daily print was four times more available than it had been a generation earlier. Newspapers were more accessible in other ways too: they were attractively designed and written in easily understood prose, and they sought out local people as subjects, advertisers and readers. As with the growth of India's "cassette culture", this transformation in the accessibility of print had "possible negative as well as positive consequences", yet it opened up "the potential for new forms of political ... democracy".² People discovered ways to think about themselves and to participate in politics that would have been unthinkable a generation before.

To understand what I mean, join me in a second-class air-conditioned carriage of the Madras Express as it left Cuddapah in the south Indian state of Andhra Pradesh on 23 March 1993. A tall, lean policeman, dark-skinned and just starting to go bald, took his place in the section inhabited by me and two Indian businessmen. Introducing himself as the Circle Inspector of Renigunta on his way back to his post, he stretched

¹ In 1976 daily circulations were calculated at 9.3 million; in 1996, 40.2 million. *Press in India* for 1977 and 1997.

² See Peter Manuel's admirable book *Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India* (Chicago University Press, 1993), especially pp. xiv-xv and p. 263 from where the quotation comes.

out on a lower berth, covered his face with his magazine – *Swati*, a Telugu monthly published from Vijayawada – and fell asleep.

When he awoke about an hour later, we began to talk as passengers do on late-running trains on long afternoons. He quizzed me about Australia, its police, its crime rate and whether it had a language of its own. When he asked what I was doing, I said I was writing a book about newspapers in Indian languages. He looked solemn. “Newspapers”, he said, “have made the police’s job more difficult.” I asked why. “Once”, he said, “if one policeman went to a village, the people were afraid. Now, six police may go to a village and people are not afraid. Newspapers have made them know that the police are not supposed to beat them.” Then, perhaps noticing that I smiled slightly, “Of course beating is a last resort.”

This encounter exemplified much that I sensed and thought I knew. If the assumption is correct that widely circulated newspapers change the way people behave politically, then here was an example of the outcome – and strong hints about why such an outcome occurred. When the Circle Inspector of Renigunta had entered the police, perhaps twenty years earlier, tales of beatings in a village had few ways to travel or places to go. To be sure, villagers might tell their relatives elsewhere when they next met at a marriage, a market or a festival. Some villagers might have been able to send their relatives a postcard about the event. But the village would have had no telephone, and it may not have had a post office. The nearest Telugu daily newspaper in Andhra Pradesh came from Vijayawada, more than 300 km. and five hours away by train from the nearest station. And a bundle of newspapers on a station platform is a long way from 50 newspapers in fifty village tea-stalls at 7 a.m. If a newspaper arrived in the village in those days, it was probably a day or two late, written in an elaborate style of Telugu and read by only a few erudite (and probably elderly and higher-caste) villagers. Such a newspaper would not have been interested in – even if it were aware of – what police did to recalcitrant countryfolk.

By 1993, however, the Telugu daily *Eenadu*, which did not exist in 1973,³ was published from Tirupati and Anantapur, towns straddling the territory of the Inspector of Renigunta. These drier, poorer areas of southern Andhra Pradesh now had daily newspapers published from within them. *Eenadu* strove to attract readers. It was notable for its “appealing photographs and captions”, the “colloquial idiom used in the presentation of stories” and “news analysis with an element of wit and sarcasm”.⁴ In 1989, moreover, *Eenadu* had devised a system that

³ For an outline of the Telugu press in 1973, see *Press and Advertisers' Year Book, 1973* (New Delhi: INFA Publications, 1973), pp. 20b-29b, 7c-13c (hereafter PAYB + year).

⁴ B.S.S. Rao and B.V. Sharma, “The Regional Press and Political Socialization”, *Vidura*,

allowed it to insert a tabloid, devoted to each district and publishing colour photographs, into every copy of its main broadsheet distributed in the relevant district each day. To feed this demand for local news, *Eenadu* developed a network of hundreds of country correspondents, who were paid small sums if their news was published. They communicated with production centres by telephone and by an arrangement with bus companies which carried country correspondents' reports to points where *Eenadu* employees collected them. *Eenadu* also had rivals. Two other Telugu dailies, *Andhra Jyoti* and *Udayam*, now published editions from Tirupati, and each sought local news through networks of local correspondents similar to *Eenadu*'s.⁵

Newspapers like *Eenadu* were owned and produced by people who had well-honed ideas about India's laws and the nature of news. Indeed, Ramoji Rao, the owner of *Eenadu*, flirted with the Communist Party of India as a youth and lived for a number of years in New Delhi where he became a businessman and a newspaper enthusiast. For such owners and their journalists, police beating villagers was both a reprehensible act and a good story. It was worth publishing because people would want to read about it. And readers were essential. Readers brought advertisers, and India's new, thrusting newspapers depended on advertisers for their profits.

Once an event became "a story", it acquired a life of its own. Once published, "a story" – police beating villagers, for example – could spread across Andhra Pradesh, reach the capital, Hyderabad, be translated into other languages, including English, and travel to New Delhi and overseas. A host of possibilities arose. Official inquiries might be ordered, police reprimanded, villagers beaten in retaliation, even a prime minister's visit organized. Countless daily events – the actions, one might say, of what had once been the audience – now sometimes found themselves on stage, part of, and thereby able to influence, a far larger political play. Such theatre was new and revolutionary.

This book seeks to describe and account for these vast changes in India's newspaper industry. The subject leads into three critical questions: (1) the relationship between print and capitalism and their role in creating (2) political identity and (3) "public" activity.

By 1997, close to 60 per cent of urban Indians and one-quarter of rural Indians were estimated to read print media regularly.⁶ How they

vol. 20, no. 2 (April 1983), p. 102.

⁵ *PAYB*, 1995, pp. 214b-219b.

⁶ N. Bhaskara Rao, "The Newspaper Scene 1998: Miles to Go", *Vidura*, January-March 1999, p. 32. IRS-98 found 58 per cent of urban adults and 24 per cent of rural adults were exposed to the print media – one-third of the total population. Television exposure was 45 per cent of the adult population overall (75 per cent urban; 33 per cent rural).

understood, treated and used what they read are questions beyond the scope of this book. The book does, however, underline the often random manner in which newspapers each day are made. The neat format of a newspaper – the sense of completeness that it conveys – belies the arbitrary decisions that are a constant part of its daily creation. Though often treated as holy writ, not simply by newspaper purchasers but by scholars, newspapers are put together by people under pressure, sometimes with selfish ends to serve. This book should encourage anyone who relies on India's newspapers to think about the processes that make them: to reflect on what it means to have a version of your world presented to you in hand-held, neatly linear, manufactured form every morning; to ask why what got into the paper, got in; to ponder what was left out; and to imagine what else went on in the world that day.⁷

Print, capitalism, newspapers and nationalism

One aspect of this book relates to the political future of India and to areas of inquiry that have teased scholars for three generations. It wrestles with questions about the role that print and capitalism play in the creation of political identity (especially “nationalist” identity) and “public” activity or a “public sphere” (a politics in which large numbers of “citizens” are able to become involved).

The Canadian scholar Harold Innis stated a bold case for the transforming role of print:

The effect of the discovery of printing was evident in the savage religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Application of power to communication industries hastened the consolidation of vernaculars, the rise of nationalism, revolution and new outbreaks of savagery in the twentieth century.⁸

It is a spectacular charge-sheet: religious war, nationalism, revolution and savagery. Innis left no doubt that he believed transformations of communications technology shaped human history more profoundly than any other developments. His two better-known intellectual descendants, Marshall McLuhan, from whose *Gutenberg Galaxy* the quotation comes, and Benedict Anderson, famed for *Imagined Communities*, gained far

⁷ In short, it is to ask the legendary city editor's question of the newsroom after the paper has been put to bed: “All right, boys and girls, what *really* happened out there today?” This was Jack Scott's story of a city editor at the *Vancouver Herald* in the 1930s. Scott, who died in 1980, was himself a legend in Canadian journalism.

⁸ Harold Innis, *The Bias of Communication* (University of Toronto Press, 1951), p. 29, quoted in Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (New York: Mentor, 1969; first published 1962), pp. 258-9. Innis's key books were *Empire and Communications* (Oxford University Press, 1950) and *The Bias of Communication*.

wider currency for their adaptations of Innis' ideas about the role of media in politics.⁹

For McLuhan "print technology...isolates the individual yet also creates massive groupings by means of vernacular nationalism."¹⁰ The process did not simply involve the transmission and preservation of information. Rather, print transformed the way in which people thought and therefore behaved. The invention of print, according to McLuhan, destroyed the spontaneity and openness of oral cultures. Print brought "lineality"; it meant that every experience could be described "in print", pinned down, ordered, preserved, – and probably sold for a price. Print closed off varieties of experience by requiring that all experience, to be taken seriously, must be capable of being organized and linear – capable of being encapsulated in print.

The formation of governments therefore depended on change in communication. Papyrus allowed long instructions to be easily written and reliably carried over long distances. Empires became possible and city-states dissolved. When papyrus became scarce, feudalism arose and prevailed until discovery of the printing press and the manufacture of cheap paper ushered in vast political and economic empires and nationalism.

McLuhan seemed little interested in the economic forces that drove or retarded the development of media technologies. Anderson bridged the gap with a hyphen: "print-capitalism ... made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate to others, in profoundly new ways." Print, driven by capitalism, created "languages-of-power" which enabled vast dreams of nations to take shape.¹¹

Full of memorably sweeping assertions, McLuhan's writing presents, as Brian Winston writes, "a media-technological explanation of modern society".¹² The same criticisms apply to the provocative insights of Anderson, who took up the McLuhan and Innis ideas in the 1980s and popularized aspects pertaining to nationalism. Anderson's term "print-

⁹ McLuhan acknowledged his debt to Innis in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*: "The present volume to this point [p. 258] might be regarded as a gloss on a single text of Harold Innis." Innis, according to McLuhan, "explained why print causes nationalism and not tribalism; and why print causes price systems and markets such as cannot exist without print. In short, Harold Innis was the first person to hit upon the *process* of change as implicit in the *forms* of media technology." *Gutenberg Galaxy*, pp. 63, 65. Anderson, less impressed by McLuhan though still indebted to him, does not mention Innis. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), pp. 38, 150-1.

¹⁰ McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy*, p. 258.

¹¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 40, 48.

¹² Winston, "How Are Media Born and Developed?", p. 71.

capitalism” described the marriage that he believed gave birth to “nationalism”. For Anderson, “the hallmark of modern nations” was the “remarkable confidence of community in anonymity”.¹³ He meant that though most New Yorkers never met most San Franciscans – or Czechs, most Czechs, etc. – they believed they were part of the same “national” community. In creating that belief, the newspaper was essential. The book and the newspaper – an “‘extreme form’ of the book”¹⁴ – were “the first modern-style mass-produced industrial commodity”: thousands of exact replicas turned out for sale and profit.¹⁵

The newspaper did two things. First, it made local languages flourish because people who mass-produced objects needed masses of people to whom to sell them. More people knew French, German and English than Latin. Such people, moreover, welcomed the dignity their spoken tongue acquired when it was written down and disseminated, as previously Latin alone had been. There was money in the mass production of the printed word, provided you did it in the right language. Second, newspapers created a daily ritual – a “mass ceremony ... a substitute for morning prayers” – that assured people “that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life.”¹⁶ The newspaper affirmed to the New Yorker that the San Franciscan 3,000 miles away really existed, reading his or her newspaper, sharing the day, the news and the language of America. If, as Renan wrote, “nationalism is a daily referendum”, the purchase of a newspaper was a vote in favour.

The most common criticism of the posited connection between print-capitalism and nationalism can be summed up in the question: why did it take so long? Gutenberg’s invention had spread across Europe by 1500, yet we date the explosion of the tendencies dubbed “modern nationalism” only from the time of the French Revolution, nearly three centuries and a dozen generations later. Moreover, as a leading historian of the period writes, “between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries ... intellectuals, mechanics and capitalists were not out of touch”.¹⁷ Indeed, they worked closely. If print-capitalism produces nationalism, what had print-capitalism been doing with itself?¹⁸

¹³ Anderson, *Imagined*, p. 40.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cantor, 1993; first published 1983), pp. 12, 103-4.

¹⁸ Winston, “How Are Media Born and Developed?”, pp. 71-2. John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: a Social Theory of the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), p. 62. See the apt remark of C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information, Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Though the printing press, the book and the newspaper were no doubt essential for the propagation of nationalism, they were not sufficient by themselves. Relationships between capitalism and governments had to change before conditions were suitable for the printing press to enable people to conceive of themselves as "citizens" of "nations". Ideas of citizenship and nationhood were carried by the press, not made by it.

If we were persuaded that print-capitalism by itself triggered nationalism, then the flowering of print-capitalism should have enormous implications for India, where print-capitalism comes in eleven scripts and at least a dozen languages.¹⁹ Nowhere in the world are there so many different scripts in so confined a geographical and political space. This ought to be a recipe for powerful, segmenting nationalisms; for even critics of the print-capitalism argument would probably concede that printing and literacy are necessary to the rise of nationalism as we recognize it. What then can the newspaper revolution of the late 1970s mean for the long-term unity of a state like India?

On the face of it, an observer would be tempted to draw on examples from modern Europe to suggest that new nationalisms, based on local languages, would grow in strength and the Indian state would face dissolution like Austria-Hungary in 1918. Selig Harrison, the American writer, said as much in 1960:

The period now beginning in India presents striking similarities to the rise of nationalism in nineteenth century Europe, especially the national upsurge in the Balkans which culminated in the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.²⁰

Harrison envisaged an India

likely to experience a succession of political shocks as centripetal and centrifugal forces alternately gain dominant strength ...

... the odds are almost wholly against the survival of freedom and ... in "the most dangerous decades" the issue is, in fact, whether any Indian state can survive at all.²¹

He foresaw the growing power in a federal democracy of regional elites, propagating local languages and fostering specific nationalisms. Burgeoning newspapers in Indian languages would

set the linguistic standard for the new regional pulp cultures, reaching out ... to all social levels and to remote villages ...

p. 374: Print-capitalism "was midwife to intellectual change, not in itself the essence of that change".

¹⁹ The scripts are Devanagari, Bengali, Gujarati, Gurmukhi, Kannada, Malayalam, Oriya, Perso-Arabic, Tamil, Telugu and Roman. See the accompanying map.

²⁰ Selig Harrison, *India: the Most Dangerous Decades* (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1968; first published 1960), p. 320.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 337-8.

... parochial political trends will gain ... in their vitality, fed by the inordinate parochialism of editorial standards in the regional language press.²²

Some of Harrison's analysis stands up remarkably well 40 years later, but the newspaper revolution, which he expected, has unfolded differently. In spite of that revolution, India was no closer to balkanization in the 1990s than it was in the 1950s. Few people contemplating Indira Gandhi's funeral in 1984 would have predicted that ten years later India would remain a unity but the Soviet Union would be a memory.

What, then, does this book suggest about the role of print and Indian-language newspapers in these great questions of nationalism and statehood? The book tries to establish that, as Harrison and others expected, a newspaper transformation occurred. But it took longer to happen than many might have hoped or guessed, and it required not just technology – though this was essential – but specific political and economic circumstances. These economic circumstances – the strengthening of all-India capitalism – had a paradoxical effect. As newspapers increasingly sought advertising, particularly national advertising, they had also to seek readers because advertisers demand evidence of value for money. Readers were to be found, as Harrison suggested, in the small towns and countryside, and such readers wanted to read about themselves. Thus the requirements of national advertisers drove newspapers to localize their production and content and simplify their language.

Up to this point, we may seem to be following the path of the print-capitalism and Harrison schools of thought outlined above. Literate people with a little money show that they are prepared to spend some of that money on reading matter. Profit is to be had from selling mass-produced reading materials, which are published in regional languages where the largest number of potential buyers lie. In print, such languages take on new and different life. Can secessionism and dissolution be far behind?

Yet such an outcome had not come to pass in India by the 1990s. Indeed, the revolution in Indian-language newspapers tended to promote, rather than undermine, the unity of an Indian state. The twenty or thirty owners of the largest newspapers in Indian languages saw themselves as members of an Indian elite. As capitalists in a difficult industry on which India's chafing economic controls had often impinged, they frequently banded together to defend their interests. More than that, however, they basked in the influence they increasingly wielded in New Delhi politicians. This happy surrender to the pleasures of a united India was matched by a nagging understanding that profitable newspapers needed

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 85-6.

big national and multi-national advertisers. With such strong incentives, the owners of major Indian-language newspapers acted as hinges, linking their regions and the Indian state in a variety of conscious and unconscious ways. The rewards of their position were power and profit; the hazards were physical danger and financial ruin.

The foregoing discussion may suggest that Indian-language newspapers published Soviet-style texts seeking to brainwash people about the legitimacy of the Indian state. This was not so. The content of successful Indian-language newspapers was subtly local and rarely dull. In some circumstances, to be sure, they could powerfully propel political parties and movements opposed to the central government of the day. But the overall thrust of their news-gathering and dissemination was to propagate subliminal ideas about the existence and legitimacy of an Indian state and an Indian nation. As Anderson (and Hegel) had written about other places and times: the daily consumption of a newspaper seemed to affirm the existence of other people of the same nationality who, newspapers reminded readers every day, were also reading their newspapers. The fact that I read mine in Telugu in Renigunta while a fellow Indian read hers in Gujarati in Rajkot was less important than that both our newspapers used Indian news agencies to report Indian weather, Indian cricket, Indian stock-market prices and Indian politics and to remind us editorially every so often that we were Indians. More important, of course, our newspapers told us about what was happening in our locality and our state. Part of this process of affirmation of an Indian identity was unconscious: proprietors and the people they employed as editors and reporters took the Indian state as given and desirable. At the same time, proprietors knew the vulnerability of newspapers to state coercion – Mrs Gandhi's 1975-7 "emergency" showed that – and recognized on which side of their chapatti the ghee was spread.

Capitalism in the late twentieth century liked large markets. Such a liking fostered the unity of the Indian state by making successful newspaper proprietors all-India actors and members of the "national" elite. There were two elements to this process. First, such proprietors relished the status and prestige. But more important, newspapers that flourished had to operate with an all-India focus to secure the advertising that brought financial success. It was very difficult, as we shall see, to maintain a newspaper on selling price alone. Thus pressures of both status and economics encouraged successful newspapers to project the fiction that all of India was at breakfast together each morning.²³

²³ I have tried to argue this point in more detail in Robin Jeffrey, "Advertising and Indian-Language Newspapers: How Capitalism Supports (Certain) Cultures and (Some) States, 1947-96", *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 70, no. 1 (spring 1997), pp. 57-83.

This may sound as if a few dozen rich families cynically manipulated the contents of their publications to maintain a cosy hegemony and a specious Indian unity. But this was not so. The reality of the newspaper business was neither predictable nor secure. Continuous struggles to control newspapers placed reporters, editors and even proprietors in danger. Those seeking to control newspapers ranged from the state (the constant adversary, along with the politicians driving it) to business people, criminals and political revolutionaries and "secessionists".

How does one explain the secessionist movements that have strained the Indian state since its beginning? Where, for example, do Punjab, Kashmir and the northeast fit into sunny pictures of national integration by newspaper? My answer runs like this. Secessionist movements have been most common in those regions where local capitalism is least developed, and certainly where successful capitalist newspapers are least developed. In Assam in the mid-1990s, for example, the ratio of Assamese-language daily newspapers to speakers of Assamese was roughly eleven newspapers per 1,000 speakers.²⁴ The same ratio for India as a whole was more than three times greater. In the smaller northeastern states, there were no capitalist newspapers worthy, if not of the name, at least of listing in the holy book of national advertisers, the *Press and Advertisers' Yearbook*.²⁵ In Kashmir, too, successful, long-standing dailies in Kashmiri had not become established.²⁶ And even in Punjab, home of the "green revolution" and the most successful capitalist agriculture in India, an established daily press in Gurmukhi, the script in which Punjabi was officially written from the mid-1960s, only slowly took root.²⁷

The places where the newspaper revolution did *not* begin in the 1970s were more likely to produce challenges to the Indian state. In such places, the absence of thrusting, capitalist-run, India-focused daily newspapers meant that large numbers of people did *not* have the sense each morning that they were sharing over their newspaper the experience

²⁴ These are crude estimates based on Assamese daily circulations of 149,000 and an estimated population of Assamese speakers of 13 million. *Press in India*, 1995 (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, n.d. [1996]) [hereafter *PII* + year], p. 42. Assamese-speaking population estimated at having grown at 2.3 per cent a year since 1971 when it was enumerated at 9 million.

²⁵ *PAYB*, 1995, p. 96b.

²⁶ "*Chaman*, a weekly published from Srinagar [...] was the only newspaper in Kashmiri", noted *PII*, 1995, p. 180. "The paper has not supplied the circulation figures". Most of 110,000 in the 1990s. *PII*, 1995, p. 222.

²⁷ For a discussion of Punjabi, and the trials of the leading Gurmukhi daily, *Ajit*, in the 1980s and 1990s, see Robin Jeffrey, "Punjabi: the Subliminal Charge", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1-8 March 1997, pp. 443-5.

of India with tens of millions like themselves. The below-the-surface message of the daily newspaper was missing; alternative messages decrying the Indian state had little competition. To be sure, the absence of capitalist-oriented daily newspapers did not by itself produce insurgencies of Punjab, Kashmir or the northeast. But the absence of such newspapers indicated that something else was lacking. A “national bourgeoisie” – people connected to and benefiting from the Indian Union – was either minuscule or missing.

Newspapers, politics and publicness

The first of the three great questions to which this study contributes an understanding is the relationship between capitalism and print; the second, the role of print and newspapers in the making of people’s ideas of themselves – especially in the making of “nationalism”. The third is the role of print and newspapers in creating the conditions for liberal democracy – in creating a “public sphere” or a “public space” – indeed, in creating widely shared ideas of a “public”.

Questions of print and “public sphere” are often associated with the German social theorist Jurgen Habermas. John B. Thompson sums up Habermas’s contribution:

He argued that the circulation of printed materials in early modern Europe played a crucial role in the transition from absolutist to liberal-democratic regimes, and that the articulation of critical public opinion through the media was a vital feature of modern democratic life.²⁸

Habermas visualized three political epochs in modern Europe. In each, media were crucial to the system of government. In each, we can see relevance to India.

The first of Habermas’ models was of a feudal society in which lords of land and lords of the church controlled the means of survival, the path to an afterlife and communications. It is easy enough to see parallels in India of the past two centuries. It is Habermas’ second stage, however, that is the most interesting for my purposes. It is also an era that Habermas idealizes. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, he argued, a genuine “public sphere” came into existence, notably in England, which was based on a growing bourgeoisie and the printing press. This “democratic public realm” was based on “cafés, newspapers, journals ... involving general discussion on public moral and political issues”.²⁹

²⁸ Thompson, *Media and Modernity*, p. 7.

²⁹ Steven Seidman in Jurgen Habermas, *On Society and Politics: a Reader*, edited by Steven Seidman (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), p. 21. For vivid illustrations, see Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1995; first

This “communicative network of a public made up of rationally debating private citizens”, which brought “the political exposure of political domination before the public use of reason”, was, however, short-lived.³⁰ It was supplanted by a third stage: mass media in mass industrial society. Habermas refers to the “the structural transformation of the bourgeois public sphere”, in which “the institutions of social-convivial interchange”, which allowed “the public [to make] use of its reason, lost their power or utterly collapsed”. They were replaced by the “commercial mass circulation press”³¹ and the transformation ““from a public critically reflecting on its culture to one that merely consumes it””.³² In mass society, “the press and broadcast media serve less as organs of public information and debate than as technologies for managing consensus and promoting consumer culture.”³³

The Habermas models have obvious flaws,³⁴ but they help to conceptualize the effects of India’s newspaper revolution on society and politics. I argue below that the newspaper revolution does create a “public sphere” of a kind. It has characteristics of both Habermas’ idealized second stage and of the despised era of mass media, but it replicates neither. What goes on in the “public sphere” produced by India’s newspaper revolution need not necessarily be rational, liberal or benign.

A common criticism of the Habermas scheme is particularly relevant for the picture of an Indian “public sphere” generated by newspapers. In his third stage of “mass culture”, Habermas depicted “the masses” as so malleable that they accepted without resistance or interpretation the messages of the industrial mass-media machines. Herded and manipulated, they accepted and consumed; they did not modify, interpret or initiate. Critics contend, however, that ordinary people in industrial

published 1771), especially pp. 35, 81.

³⁰ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), pp. 247, 195.

³¹ Habermas, *Structural*, p. 195.

³² Habermas quoted in Arjun Appadorai and Carol A. Breckenridge, “Public Modernity in India” in Carol A. Breckenridge (ed.), *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 2.

³³ Thomas McCarthy in Habermas, *Structural*, p. xii.

³⁴ Habermas seems naively to glorify and misunderstand the eighteenth-century London of his “public sphere”. To suggest that the journals, coffee houses and discussions of governments seems to me outlandish. No doubt the ideal of a “public” – largely free of government influence, in which people constantly give and receive opinions, from which action results – is desirable. But it is difficult to believe that eighteenth-century England was such a place.

societies have always been more resilient, active and critical than the Habermas view allows. They have been capable not merely of consuming print but of using it to protect their interests and affect their lives.³⁵ In India, this widening capacity to use print has represented a fundamental change in the scope and nature of politics.

Consideration of Habermas and his critics allows us to devise benchmarks, against which we can begin to appreciate the immense transformation in political potential and “public” activity that the newspaper revolution has propelled in India. First, I would modify Habermas’ three stages. I would retain the first stage: India, like pre-bourgeois Europe, knew a time – parts of India still knew it in the 1990s – when lords of land controlled people and ideas, when most people could not read and when those who could found little use for their skills. Even Habermas’ second stage – the idealized “public sphere” of rational debate – had a parallel. Members of India’s elites often in the 1990s deplored the effects of the newspaper revolution – vulgarity titillating the semi-literate – and harked back to former times when serious editors edited serious (and scarce) newspapers for serious (and scarce) readers.³⁶

It is, however, in a modified version of Habermas’ third stage – the “massification” of print – that we have a device to highlight the effects of the newspaper revolution. We need to envisage, as some of Habermas’s critics have contended, a public sphere, created by mass print media, in which readers are not merely malleable dunces. In this public sphere, the masses are not effortlessly manipulated, and the effects of mass media are unpredictable. The messages of proprietors and their class are capable of being accepted, rejected or reinterpreted by readers. Readers, moreover, are capable of injecting *their* messages into print and pushing their concerns to the fore, rather than simply being pushed in any direction proprietors care to guide them. This, then, is a different model from those of Habermas, and it more accurately reflects outcomes of the newspaper revolution in India as it had unfolded in the 1990s. Readers, in league with newspapers, bring to bear a new resource, “publicity”, to change their conditions of life, the policies of governments and the nature of politics itself. An example illustrates how the process works and why it marks a break with the past.

In 1994, the Congress Party government of the state of Andhra Pradesh in south India reluctantly banned the sale of arrack (country spirits),

³⁵ Alan O’Connor and John Downing, “Culture and Communication” in Downing *et al.* (eds), *Questioning the Media*, p. 17. Thompson, *Media and Modernity*, p. 74.

³⁶ This critique was put to me vividly by the editor of *Mathrubhumi Weekly* and award-winning writer, M.T. Vasudevan Nair. Interview, Calicut, 3 April 1993. But it was a cry to be heard from Pune to Calcutta in the 1990s.

from which it derived a large revenue in excise duty.³⁷ The pressure for prohibition grew out of women's literacy classes in a village called Dubagunta in Nellore, one of the poor dry districts of southern Andhra Pradesh. The starting of the literacy classes owed something to newspapers. A similar campaign in Kerala gained national prominence and led to attempts to duplicate it elsewhere. According to an account in *Eenadu*,

The real story began in May 1992 at Dubagunta, a village in Nellore district, when three drunkard labourers lost their way and were drowned in the village tank. The women of the village marched to the arrack shop and forced its closure. Obviously, "Seethama Katha", an important lesson that they learnt in the adult literacy class, was at the back of their minds.³⁸

"Seethama Katha" – the "Story of Sita" – was a simple tale in one of the primers used in the literacy classes. It told how women organized and agitated to overcome the drunkenness that afflicted their village.³⁹ If Sita in the story could do it, women of the literacy class in Dubagunta are said to have asked, why can't we?

Dubagunta is not all that far from Renigunta, the base of the Inspector of Police whose story began this introduction, and by 1992, as we know, a number of Telugu dailies were published in nearby Tirupati. Eager correspondents for these newspapers found good copy in the women's confrontation with drunks and liquor-sellers. The story quickly circulated round the state, and women elsewhere marched on arrack shops and sought to stop the auction of government contracts to sell arrack. "Drunkards are being dragged into the street", a scholar wrote of Kurnool district,

their heads clean-shaved; the liquor dealers are being brought into the "chowrasta" [street] garlanded with chappals and onions and made to ... ride a donkey and taken through the village.⁴⁰

A local ruckus became a state-wide movement.

"The Press (especially the *Eenadu Daily*)", wrote an old campaigner

³⁷ Prohibition was removed three years later. The state could not afford the loss of revenue.

³⁸ Vikram in *Eenadu*, 8 March 1993. This was a background article for international women's day. The translation was supplied to me by A.K. Das Gupta, *Eenadu's* chief of research.

³⁹ Vavilala Gopalakrishnaiah, "Reflections on Anti-Arrack Movement – Past and Present", in B. Sarveswara Rao and G. Parthasarathy (eds), *Anti-Arrack Movement of Women in Andhra Pradesh and Prohibition Policy* (New Delhi: Har-Anand, 1997), p. 19.

⁴⁰ Kancha Ilaiah, "Andhra Pradesh's Anti-Liquor Movement" in Sarveswara Rao and Parthasarathy (eds), *Anti-Arrack Movement*, p. 80. A documentary film, *Why Women Unite* (Drishti Media Group, 1997; director: Shabnam Vimani), has also been made about the anti-arrack movement.

for prohibition, “played a notable role in educating its readers both about alcohol and the anti-arrack agitations.”⁴¹ From October 1992, *Eenadu*, the largest Telugu daily, devoted a page a day to prohibition. “War on Liquor”, proclaimed the banner headline on page 8 of the Hyderabad edition on 22 February 1993. In the sixteen-page tabloid insert specifically for Hyderabad, an anti-liquor story was on the front page. The story told of the evils of drink, while twelve other items reported on the anti-liquor campaign around Andhra Pradesh: a village that had been happy and liquor-free for thirty-five years; a popular slogan in Telugu – “If you drink, you’ll suffer; If you don’t, you’ll benefit.” It was “local colour” that most journalists in English-speaking countries would have recognized.

When I visited *Eenadu* in February and March 1993, the proprietor, Ramoji Rao, apologized for offering only fruit juice to a foreign guest at lunch. Not long ago, he said, they would have offered alcohol too, but since the newspaper had embarked on its prohibition campaign, to offer alcohol would be hypocritical.⁴² “Never before in the history of Andhra Pradesh”, Vikram of *Eenadu* claimed, “was there such a mass upsurge against liquor.” That “a mass upsurge” could spread from a village in a relatively undeveloped district underlined the way in which the newspaper revolution made things happen faster and wider – indeed, made things happen that otherwise would not happen at all.

To be sure, some Telugu newspapers were sceptical about the depth of popular support for prohibition, which they claimed was a hobby-horse, vigorously rocked by *Eenadu* and Ramoji Rao. But the owner of one such newspaper was himself a liquor manufacturer. And the popular zeal for prohibition undoubtedly helped N. T. Rama Rao and his Telugu Desam Party sweep back to office in the state elections of 1994 with 213 of 292 seats and 44 per cent of the vote.⁴³

The process that this brief account of the prohibition drive illustrates is a far cry from Habermas’ idealized “public sphere” of “rationally debating private citizens”. At the same time, however, it seems clear that such a campaign could not have happened without the newspaper revolution. Earlier, information moved irregularly and impermanently. The tale of a liquor contractor, head shaved, garlanded with chappals and placed on a donkey, might have become part of regional lore over weeks and years. However, for the sub-editors putting out district editions

⁴¹ Gopalakrishnaiah, “Reflections,” p. 19.

⁴² Interview, Ramoji Rao, Hyderabad, 11 March 1993.

⁴³ David Butler, Ashok Lahiri, Prannoy Roy, *India Decides: Elections, 1952-95*, 3rd edn (New Delhi: Books & Things, 1995), p. 135. When Andhra Pradesh retreated from prohibition in 1997, *Eenadu* deplored the move in an editorial, but it does not appear to have launched a sustained campaign against laxer liquor laws.

of *Eenadu* from the Tirupati production centre, this was a good story. Could they get pictures of the contractor? The women? The donkey? Their superiors in Hyderabad also saw a story with wide interest. Within days it was around the state, and small-town correspondents were scrabbling to improve their incomes by finding stories about prohibition in their area. Other newspapers could not afford to ignore a story with such "public interest". No wonder that governments and politicians, once the newspaper revolution made itself obvious, became more respectful to the proprietors of Indian-language newspapers.

Eenadu did not invent the anti-arrack movement. Nor could the newspaper manipulate the movement as it chose. When the government of Andhra Pradesh, needing revenue, relaxed prohibition in 1997, *Eenadu* objected, but did not try to revive the prohibition campaign.⁴⁴ Newspapers can identify feelings, report actions and provide a platform (or a "vehicle" or a "medium"). Their potency is that they make things known in the same way over wide areas, with the visual authority (those neat columns and clean letters) and durability of print. And once in print, a "story" has, as the cliché aptly says, a life of its own.

The outcomes, however, will not necessarily be "liberal" or "progressive." Indeed, though print was essential for the so-called "liberal project", the spread of newspapers does not predetermine the emergence of a liberal society. New media may be used "for hate-mongering, provocation, and petty factionalism".⁴⁵ The public sphere created by the newspaper revolution is like a public park: a wide variety of people may frequent it. They will not necessarily all be clean and modishly dressed, just as all the ideas in the public sphere will not necessarily be gentle, liberal and rational.

Indeed people familiar with modern India will ask: "How has the so-called newspaper revolution affected the rise of the 'Hindu factor' and the issue of mosque and temple in Ayodhya in north India?" From the early 1980s, politics in Hindi-speaking areas of India seemed to crystallize around broad social conflicts and great social categories. "Forward castes", "Other Backward Castes" (OBC), "Scheduled Castes" (SC) and "the Muslims" were increasingly treated by journalists and politicians as if they represented solid blocs of votes capable of being rallied in elections. In the past, such vast categories had little social meaning: people in Hindu society were born into *jati*, endogamous "sub"-castes, which a hundred years ago were usually defined by occupation. In north India, there are hundreds of such *jati*, and the idea of groups of them organizing to act purposefully and politically was

⁴⁴ *Frontline*, 2 May 1997, p. 42. Arrack, the drink of the poor, remained banned; "Indian-made foreign liquor" was legalized.

⁴⁵ Manuel, *Cassette Culture*, p. 12.

impractical even forty or fifty years ago. *Jati*, as they behaved in the old days, were supposed to be discrete and interdependent, not coalescing and competitive.

While each of the four social categories noted above has specific concerns that foster some unified feeling, none is large enough to deliver electoral majorities on its own. An alternative political strategy – also plausible since the 1980s – has arisen: the creation of a “Hindu community”, with all “Hindus” united to build a powerful India and ward off “minority” (usually meaning “Muslim”) challenges. This strategy is associated with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), whose core of support came from “forward castes,” particularly urban trading castes and Brahmins.

Election results after 1989 demonstrated that both strategies were plausible. Different political parties, purporting on one hand to represent specific groups of “castes” and on the other, the interests of “the Hindus” as a whole, sometimes secured significant shares of the vote and of seats in the legislatures. But how had such aggregations become effective, given that they seemed to mark fundamental change in social and political organization in north India? Part of an explanation has been ascribed to vastly improved communications, particularly the arrival of television as an all-India presence from 1982. It is common for scholars to point to the immensely popular television serials of the Hindu epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, which screened between 1987 and 1990. These serials, it is argued, standardized great tales that once had countless local variations and created conditions that made it plausible to assert that “Hindus are one” and should therefore act accordingly in politics.⁴⁶ “It is [I agree] naive to claim that the circulation of Mahabharat on Doordarshan [India’s national television organization] led to the growth of Hindu fundamentalism ...”⁴⁷ But it seems equally true that many political events from the mid-1980s would not have taken shape as they did without the effects of such television.

The role of Hindi-language newspapers in such processes is, I suspect, of equal importance, but less discussed or understood. Part of the reason lies in the nature of newspapers themselves. Newspapers were hard to keep track of, especially as they expanded and different editions were published from many small towns. Where did a scholar easily find a set of, say, the Gorakhpur edition of *Dainik Jagran* or indeed any Hindi newspaper? Newspapers performed many of their transformations subliminally – to use a word much liked by McLuhan. Simply by appearing every day, in the same way and the same shape, with their ranks of

⁴⁶ Ananda Mitra, *Television and Popular Culture in India: a Study of the Mahabharat* (New Delhi: Sage, 1993), especially pp. 90-116.

⁴⁷ Mitra, *Television*, p. 148.

type in strong, straight columns, newspapers effected change in the way people viewed the possibilities of their world. With television, on the other hand, an analyst had the relatively simple task of acquiring a videotape of programs thought to be significant and then viewing and thinking about them at a convenient time. This was cleaner, clearer and easier work than the messy job of trying to locate and make sense of small-town newspapers.

In a rare attempt to understand the wider effects of the newspaper revolution in north India, Charu and Mukul focussed on newspaper coverage in 1990 of the movement to destroy the Babari mosque in Ayodhya. The reader's "eyes, mind, heart", they wrote, "were ... manipulated and ruled by the ideas and ideology of the newspapers".⁴⁸ Referring to the first of L. K. Advani's propaganda tours aimed at Ayodhya in September and October 1990, they contended that significant numbers of Hindi newspapers "identified with the rath yatra [chariot journey] completely. It was not merely reporting; it was a propoganda [sic] campaign ..." ⁴⁹ which performed "the shameful and horrible work of fanning communal passions".⁵⁰ The broader outcome was "the 'Hinduization' of the press" and "the portrayal of the upper-caste Hindu's view as the only true reality".⁵¹ I touch on some of these events later in this book; but thorough analysis of the effects of Indian-language newspapers remains a barely-begun task.⁵²

For now, it is enough to argue that the scope for broader political identification and action, which the newspaper revolution helped to bring about, does not produce Habermas' idealized "public sphere" of rationally debating citizens. But it does produce political conditions fundamentally different from those existing in relatively unconnected towns and villages among non-reading populations. Newspapers lay out avenues for public activity that previously did not exist. Those avenues do not necessarily lead to liberal, rational destinations; they may lead to "publics" – wide groups of people discussing, forming opinions and sometimes organizing and acting together – that support superstition, prejudice and oppression. The effects of the newspaper revolution do not exclude or guarantee particular outcomes.

The newspaper revolution required a conjunction of political, technical and economic circumstances. The sequence, I think, goes like this. First

⁴⁸ Charu and Mukul *Print Media and Communalism* (New Delhi: Mukul, 1990), p. 35.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2, Foreword by Ajay Kumar, editor, *Udbhavna*.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵² My colleagues at La Trobe University, Peter Friedlander and Sanjay Seth, have made a start with a research project on *Dainik Jagran* and *Punjab Kesari* for the first half of 1998.

comes literacy. Small, literate elites use print to communicate with each other, entertain themselves and discuss ideas of culture and "progress". Profit is not the chief motive, and print is mostly confined to this elite audience. The majority of people lack both literacy and uses for a newspaper. The second stage may take a long time coming. It begins when the majority of people, among whom literacy has grown, finds a need for newspapers, often as a result of having become engaged in politics. In Kerala, the social dislocation of the early twentieth century affected very large numbers of people and led to widespread political organization and activity from the 1930s, as I note in Chapter 1. In north India, in contrast, such a political phenomenon dates from the mid-1970s and the conditions that led to, and the outcomes of, Mrs Gandhi's "emergency" of 1975-7. The enforced "family planning" campaign and coercive vasectomy program, for example, sent shivers through thousands of villages. When the "emergency" ended, very large numbers of now-literate people were keen as never before to know about events, not only in their towns and villages but beyond.

As the newspaper habit spreads, the prevalence of newspapers, and their keenness for local news, opens up new avenues of politics. In short, the desire to know, created by political involvement, provokes strong demand for existing newspapers. In response to that demand, proprietors expand their newspapers, using the most effective technology available. In the late 1970s, ideal technology in the form of computers and offset presses became readily available in India. Newspaper proprietors used advertising revenues, swelled because larger circulations promised larger markets, to pay for the technology that enabled still further expansion. This expansion in turn built a vastly enlarged public arena, open to many more people than ever before. The nature of political processes was changed thereby.⁵³ From the rise of the Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh to the campaigns to destroy the Babari Masjid in north India, many political movements of the 1980s and 1990s become intelligible only with this newspaper revolution in mind.

⁵³ Minko Sotiron, *From Politics to Profit: the Commercialization of Canadian Daily Newspapers, 1890-1920* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), p. 6, captures the process in Canada: "The publisher was forced to commercialize ... to attract the wider readership necessary to attract the advertising revenues that were in turn necessary to pay for the new equipment and techniques."

TRANSFORMING

If you had walked past the offices of *Mathrubhumi*, one of Malayalam's two great daily newspapers, in K.P.K. Menon Road in Calicut¹ in Kerala in 1993, you would have observed a scene that appeared unchanged for many years. Faded pink paint flaked from the concrete four-storey building, construction work was in progress as usual and the smell of fish from the nearby market floated in the air. Tucked into a busy street on the seaward side of the railway line, the non-descript building recalled the designs of public works departments in the 1950s. The building had stood up to heavy use. *Mathrubhumi* was a substantial newspaper, the second largest daily in Malayalam (circulation 459,000, according to *ABC January-June 1993*) and one of the ten largest newspapers in India. The road was named after *Mathrubhumi*'s founder, K.P. Kesava Menon (1886-1978), who started the newspaper in 1923 to fight the British.

On a hot night in April 1993, you could have stood, sticky with sweat, in the loading bay and gulped down the sweet tea that the canteen provided free to staff. Around you the distribution workers would have been readying bundles of newspapers from the press room to load into taxis and trucks. The scene of purposeful tumult, characteristic of newspapers around the world, would have seemed no different from the way it had been for years.

Even if you climbed the steep wooden staircase, a patchwork of bare wood and grimy remains of cream paint, you would have reached a first level cluttered with familiarity: narrow passages, harsh light and warrens of cubby-holes. Only when you drew breath and asked about the composing room – the area where journalists' copy is made into newspapers – would the revolution in Indian-language newspapers have assailed you and taken your breath away, even more sharply than the fish market in the street below.

Fifteen years earlier, *Mathrubhumi* was a modern paper by the standards of the Indian-language press. It had a circulation of 276,000 (*ABC July-December 1978*) printed on rotary presses using curved plates cast

¹ Calicut is the widely known anglicized name of the town. Its name in Malayalam is Kozhikode. Alternative place names are explained in the opening pages of this book.

from hot metal. More important, it had acquired in the 1960s equipment from the Monotype company which allowed Malayalam type to be set mechanically from hot lead, the same process that had been the foundation of English-language newspaper production in India since the 1920s.² This process was effective up to a point, but it was not well-suited to Indian scripts. The resulting newspaper tended to look muddy and unattractive, though *Mathrubhumi*'s production was better than most. Little variety of type faces was available. The body type – the type in which the stories were printed – had to be relatively large to achieve clarity, and this added to costs because larger type took up more space and required more newsprint.

A more dramatic aspect, however, would have struck a visitor to the production area. Hot-metal composition was noisy, hot, dirty and dangerous. The men who sat at the cumbersome keyboards usually dripped sweat. Molten lead bubbled inside the Monotype or Linotype machines, which, because of their size and weight, took up a lot of space, usually in the basement. Solidified lead droplets littered rough concrete floors, and composing rooms clattered and clanked with the noise of metal against metal. It was a scene, perhaps not from the inferno, but at least from a foundry or a machine-shop. The men who sat at the machines were mechanics, not typists, journalists or writers; they could as easily have been operating a lathe.

Familiar with these conditions, a visitor in 1993 might have wondered whether *Mathrubhumi* still produced a newspaper. Type-setting, you would have been told, now took place on the first level. But on the first level there was no noise and apparently too little space to accommodate the equipment necessary to set type for a big daily newspaper. Led down a passageway, you would have come to a partition, glass-fronted from waist height, and in front of the glass door leading inside, a pile of sandals. The dominant sound was the loud drone of the air-conditioners. Inside the room clean, cool, neatly dressed men peered at video screens and tapped away at computer terminals. Malayalam characters were on every screen.

The scene embodied the technical side of the revolution in Indian-language newspapers. The type-setting staff, who once had the most arduous conditions on a newspaper, now sat in air-conditioned comfort, their sandals left at the door – not out of temple-visiting reverence but to limit dust and dirt inside. Air-conditioning was not a result of management's concern for the comfort of workers, but because computers were more reliable if they did not have to function in temperatures of

² "A Brief History of the Mathrubhumi", printed history, 2 pp., given to me in Calicut, April 1993.

35 degrees celsius, which was common in the Linotype or Monotype rooms of the old technology.

My guide one night in Calicut was a young assistant manager with an electronics diploma from a Kerala college; but many of the terminal operators were men who had worked as hot-metal typesetters and been re-trained. They now shared the dignity and status of air-conditioning with senior executives. Middle management at *Mathrubhumi* still mopped its brows under ceiling fans. The world had not been turned upside down, but it seemed to have been pulled inside out.

By international standards, the technology used at *Mathrubhumi* in the early 1990s was well tried and widely known. But its dissemination in India, reaching even to regional towns like Calicut, required a particular conjunction of technical, political and economic circumstances which came about in the 1970s. As we saw in the Introduction, the result was a newspaper revolution unprecedented in history. It had happened in a country with eighteen official languages (plus English) and ten major scripts (plus Roman) and where half the population in the 1980s was illiterate.

The costs of printing in a variety of scripts were a powerful disincentive to the growth of Indian-language newspapers for many years. But by the 1980s, the literate half of India's population displayed a growing purchasing power, symbolized by the cotton-terylene shirts on the operators in the computer rooms at *Mathrubhumi*. Promise of reward promoted sufficient investment to overcome the barriers to a print revolution in India.

Languages

One of those barriers was language, which had burned fiercely as a political issue in India for a century. Table 2.1, which lists India's official languages, illustrates the complexity and hints at the potential for problems. The figures come from the 1981 census because as late as 1998, the census figures for languages from the 1991 census were not available. There are at least two plausible reasons. First, language statistics are so difficult to compile and so slippery to analyze that census officials may have set them aside as too time-consuming and difficult to process. Alternatively, because the publication of language statistics can lead to heated dispute and violence if one group claims to have been undercounted and the numbers of another exaggerated, the editors may have decided to postpone publication of the figures indefinitely.

The Table suggests the political volatility of language. Assamese, for example, had to be omitted from the 1981 census. Widespread unrest directed against non-Assamese people made it impossible to conduct

the census in Assam in 1981. Language, of course, was a crucial definer of what it was to be "Assamese". Moreover, each of the small languages – Konkani, Manipuri, Nepali, Sanskrit and Sindhi – had its own political story to tell.³

Table 2.1. INDIA'S 18 OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

<i>Language</i>	<i>Speakers, 1981 census (millions)</i>
Assamese	9 (in 1971)
Bengali	51.5
Gujarati	33.2
Hindi	264.2
Kannada	26.9
Kashmiri	3.2
Konkani	<i>n.a.</i>
Malayalam	26.0
Manipuri	<i>n.a.</i>
Marathi	49.6
Nepali	<i>n.a.</i>
Oriya	22.9
Punjabi	18.6
Sanskrit	<i>n.a.</i>
Sindhi	1.9
Tamil	44.7
Telugu	54.2
Urdu	35.3

Source: *SOI, 1989-90*, p. 44.

In ancient times, Indian scholars were among the first in the world to systematize and codify language. By the fifth century BCE, Panini, the legendary grammarian, had set down the rules of Sanskrit, the language of classical India, in a form still valid today.⁴ A version of that script survives as Devanagari, in which modern Hindi, Marathi and Nepali are written. Though Sanskrit ceased to be a language of ordinary people nearly 2,000 years ago, it remained a language of Hindu philosophy and high culture. Brahmins throughout India learned it, and the classics of Hindu religion were written in it. Similarities with the

³ Konkani, for example, is the state language of Goa; Manipuri, of Manipur. Sanskrit, though a "dead language" in that no one today speaks it as a mother-tongue, was included by the constitution-makers of 1950 as a sentimental gesture and political statement.

⁴ See the article by Christopher Shackleton in Francis Robinson (ed.), *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of India* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 402-05.

position of Latin – and to some extent with Arabic and Mandarin Chinese – are obvious.⁵

In north India, the languages of daily life often derived grammar and vocabulary from Sanskrit; but the conditions of a peasant society, in which movement was difficult even for people of high status, meant that local variations in speech progressively shaded off to the point where people could not understand each other.⁶ In the south, the so-called “Dravidian languages” differed from Sanskrit in both grammar and vocabulary.

British governments, which put down roots from the 1770s, gloried in recording and clarifying, bringing order and making tidy. In part, officials found such measures necessary: they were trying to govern places they often did not understand and where the decline of order in previous generations had created the gap the British filled. To create records and precedents helped to ensure smooth transitions, continuous government and regular revenues. Moreover, many of these British officials were infused with the spirit of cataloguing and defining that went with the “enlightenment” of the eighteenth century. For Indian languages, this meant a steady process by which scholar-administrators decided what a language was, who spoke it and where its boundaries began and ended. Others – notably Christian missionaries and their associates – busied themselves in writing languages down, preparing grammars and compiling dictionaries. An artificial clarity was imposed which may well have distorted various local practices, but which no one dealing with government could avoid.

Printing – “casting type”, which has appropriate echoes of “setting in stone” – perfectly symbolized this process.⁷ To make movable type for a script required thought, planning, money and skill. Once a font of metal type was created for a written alphabet, other elements of standardization were likely to follow. Printers who created or owned such fonts had an interest in using them, but little interest in knowing about or accommodating scores of local variations.⁸ By the beginning of the twentieth century the eleven scripts common in India today (I now include Roman) were used in scores of print shops all over the country as movable, hand-composed metal types.

The clarity with which it seemed possible to identify the major

⁵ Anderson, *Imagined*, pp. 20-5.

⁶ Christopher R. King, *One Language, Two Scripts: the Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 7-8.

⁷ Marshall McLuhan of course wrote about it. Jonathan Miller, *McLuhan* (London: Fontana [Modern Masters], 1971), p. 75.

⁸ King, *One Language*, pp. 24, 155, points out that even Devanagari script had rivals in eastern U.P. and Bihar in the nineteenth century.

languages influenced the reorganization of the Indian National Congress on a linguistic basis in 1921. Instead of administrative units following the boundaries of British provinces, the Congress under Mahatma Gandhi's influence, created a number of units based on language – a committee for the Tamil area, a committee for the Bengali area, etc. Gandhi aimed to bring politics closer to the people by transacting political business, not in English, known only to a tiny fraction of less than one per cent, but in their own mother-tongues. To reject English, moreover, was to break the bonds of imperialism symbolically. To replace English as a country-wide *lingua franca*, Gandhi promoted “Hindustani”, the simple speech of north India, which readily borrowed and blended words from various languages and regions.

Scripts, however, had become entrenched and their status, divisive. Gandhi advocated writing all Indian languages in Devanagari and rejected suggestions that the Roman script serve effectively as a common script.⁹ Other nationalists, including the Bengali Subhas Chandra Bose (1898-1945), argued for the Roman script, while the Tamil C. Rajagopalachari (1879-1972) suggested writing Hindi or Hindustani in the scripts of the regional languages. Under the British, the Indian Army wrote Hindustani in the Roman script, a practice abolished only in 1951.¹⁰

As a means of writing a “national language”, whatever such a language might be called, the most bitter division was between Devanagari and the Perso-Arabic script. The partition of 1947 associated the Perso-Arabic script with Muslims, Pakistan, the language called Urdu¹¹ and the betrayal of one version of the nationalist dream. The language debates in the Constituent Assembly between 1946 and 1949 were remarkably acrimonious.¹² Advocates of “Hindi” removed Urdu from most official functions in the new India and sought to eliminate English as well. The “Hindi” they advocated was to be written in the Devanagari script

⁹ Peter Brock, *The Mahatma and Mother India: Essays on Gandhi's Non-Violence and Nationalism* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan. 1983), p. 140, quoting from *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 61, pp. 32-3.

¹⁰ Vasantha Surya, “Script Reform as an Aspect of Modernisation of Indian Languages in the News Media”, paper, Seminar on Modernisation of Indian Languages in the News Media, Hyderabad, Osmania University, 1-3 February 1978. Granville Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1976; 1st published 1966), p. 272. P. Kodanda Rao, *Language Issue in the Indian Constituent Assembly, 1946-50: Rational Support for English and Non-Rational Support for Hindi* (Bombay: International Book House, 1969), p. 29. *Report of the Official Language Commission 1956* (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1957), p. 227.

¹¹ Hindi and Urdu in their simplest spoken form are the same. The script in which they are written differentiates them, as does their literary and abstract vocabulary. Hindi draws its roots from Sanskrit; Urdu, from Persian and Arabic.

¹² Austin, *Indian Constitution*, p. 277. He devotes a chapter (pp. 265-307) to the language question.

and draw its vocabulary solely from Sanskrit. It was, in short, a language most familiar to upper-caste north Indian Hindus, whose more extravagant claims caused resentment in south India.

Ultimately the constitution of 1950 made Hindi the "official language" of the Indian Union, but provided for the continued use of English for official purposes for fifteen years. When that period expired in the mid-1960s, pressure from the non-Hindi-speaking states resulted in makeshift arrangements that allowed English to continue as a language of the central government and those states that wished to retain it. The constitution also provided for the recognition of languages of regional or cultural importance. It listed fourteen; four were added later (see Table 2.1).

The constitution-makers felt two different pressures arising from the emotional power of language and from the degree to which some languages were entrenched. First, enveloped in the aftermath of partition, they searched for ways to avoid further division of India. Language seemed to offer one of the most threatening lines of fissure. Yet the Gandhian reorganization of the Congress on a linguistic basis implied that a free India would arrange its administrative units to reflect the mother-tongues of the people. The Linguistic Provinces Commission of 1948, rejecting language-based states, conjured up a frightening vision of what such states might mean:

This inquiry has ... been an eye-opener to us. The work of sixty years of the Indian National Congress was standing before us face to face with centuries-old India of narrow loyalties, petty jealousies and ignorant prejudices engaged in a mortal conflict, and we were simply horrified to see how thin was the ice upon which we were skating.

... [regional chauvinism constitutes] a mentality which ... will be the death-knell of Indian nationalism.¹³

Yet the nationalist struggle and its emphasis on regional languages created irresistible expectations after 1947. A sense also grew, even among those all-India politicians opposed to language-based states, that language was less subversive of the "Indian nation" than religion. India's states were reorganized on a language basis in 1956. In the 1990s, thirteen constitutionally recognized languages as their official state language; six other states used Hindi.¹⁴

The importance in all this was financial investment. By the 1950s eleven different scripts had had money invested in them to establish

¹³ *Report of the Linguistic Provinces Commission*, (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1948), pp. 32-3.

¹⁴ Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura use languages not recorded in the eighth schedule of the constitution.

printing and publishing industries. For a hundred years at least, governments had underwritten these scripts, and the languages associated with them, by attempting to identify and count speakers and to explain languages' origins and development. Government-financed education systems produced textbooks and trained teachers to teach the languages at primary and secondary school. By the late nineteenth century universities had departments and courses devoted to the study of these languages. And from the 1920s Gandhi promoted them as essential elements in the nationalist movement: their expanded use for official, written purposes helped to validate and explain the struggle for independence. When independence came, India's planners did not have a blank page on which to write language policies. Various languages were deeply bedded down, supported by financial interest, government commitment and sentimental attachment.

To understand the sway that these languages exercised in their written form, we need to strike a balance. They were, to be sure, firmly established in their regions. But their printed reach was forlornly limited. The first Press Commission of 1954 concluded that twelve Indian languages, excluding English, required detailed discussion. But it could find only 330 daily newspapers in the whole of India with a total circulation of about 2.5 million copies, nearly 28 per cent of which was in English (see Table 2.2).

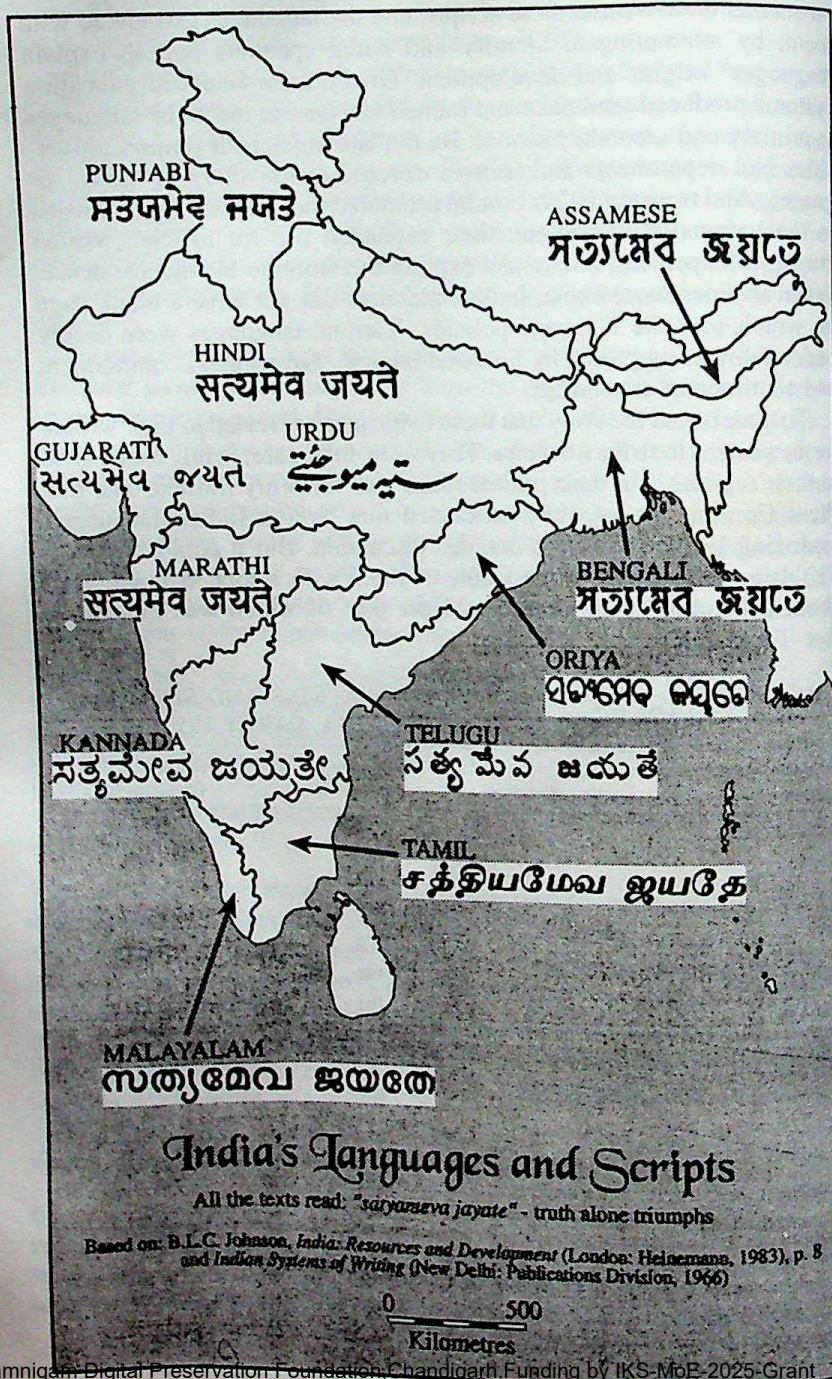
Table 2.2. DAILY NEWSPAPERS, CIRCULATIONS AND SPEAKERS OF VARIOUS LANGUAGES IN INDIA, EARLY 1950s

<i>Language</i>	<i>No. of dailies</i>	<i>Circulation 1951 (thousands)</i>	<i>Speakers 1951 (thousands)</i>
Assamese	1	3	5,000
Bengali	7	240	25,100
Gujarati	23	187	16,300
Hindi	76	379	150,000*
Kannada	25	72	14,500
Malayalam	21	196	13,400
Marathi	26	191	27,100
Oriya	3	43	12,200
Punjabi	9	23	—
Tamil	12	168	26,600
Telugu	6	98	33,000
Urdu	70	213	—
English	41	697	1,100 [†]
Smaller languages	9	15	—

* Includes people returning Hindi, Hindustani, Punjabi and Urdu as their language

[†]Estimated (on the high side) at 3% of the population of 361 million

Sources: Press Commission, 1954, Part 1, *Report*, pp. 15, 17. *Manorama Year Book, 1961* (Malayalam) (Kottayam: Manorama Publishing House, 1961), pp. 166-7.



The expression "could find" is appropriate. The Commission complained of its letters being returned unopened, of state governments unaware of the newspapers published within their jurisdiction and of "the chaotic condition of the statistics".¹⁵ The difficulty of finding readers and distributing a newspaper among an overwhelmingly illiterate rural population resulted in a lack of investment in Indian-language newspapers. An estimated 55 per cent of newspapers were sold in state capital cities, though their combined population totalled only 7 per cent of India's people.¹⁶ India had a language map more complex than Europe's, and small local elites were deeply committed economically and emotionally to their languages; but these were not yet languages of mass reading publics. An essential ingredient of such a public was missing: literacy.

Literacy, wealth and politics: why buy a newspaper?

For people to become newspaper readers, a newspaper has to reach them; they have to be able either to afford it or have a hospitable place – a reading room or a tea stall – to read it; and they must *want* to read it – they must be motivated. But first they must be able to read.

Even in 1951, India had more literate people than the United Kingdom. About 18 per cent of the population over five years – roughly 50 million people – were recorded in the census of 1951 as being able to read and write (see Table 2.3). But they were spread over vast areas, divided

Table 2.3. LITERATES BY CENSUS, 1951-91

	<i>No. of literates (million)</i>	<i>% Literate</i>
1951	50	18*
1961	100	28*
1971	162	35*
1981	234	44†
1991	352	52†

*Based on people aged five years and above

†Based on people aged seven years and above

Source: *Census of India, 1991, Series 1, India, Paper 1 of 1991, Provisional Population Tables*, pp. 59, 61.

among a dozen or more languages, and many, even of the literate, were too poor to buy a newspaper or lived in regions where newspapers rarely reached them. And why should they want to read newspapers or, indeed, anything else?

¹⁵ *Report of the Press Commission, 1954, Part 1, Report* (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1954), pp. 13-14.

¹⁶ *Press Commission, 1954, Part 1, Report*, pp. 18, 20-2.

Between 1951 and 1991, the number of literates in India increased by seven times to provide 350 million potential readers by the 1990s. But rates of literacy varied from one region to another, along with levels of wealth and the political fascination that appears to motivate people to become newspaper readers. Kerala, the most literate state, with rates above 90 per cent in the 1990s, was also its most widely politicized and its most committed consumer of newspapers. Yet Kerala was relatively poor and the average income of its people consistently below the dismal national average.¹⁷ At the opposite pole, the state of Bihar in the Hindi-speaking north had literacy rates in the 1960s of less than 20 per cent, three daily newspapers circulated for every 1,000 people, and voter turnouts were less than 50 per cent.¹⁸ By the 1980s, however, even Bihar's literacy rate had risen to 40 per cent, roughly what Kerala's had been in 1961. The social transformation, and the growth of newspapers which both accompanied and accelerated it, now began to affect almost every corner of the country, even poor and remote corners like Bihar and Orissa.¹⁹

What part do wealth and prosperity play in the expansion of newspapers? In an equation that tries to explain newspaper growth, technology and literacy are necessary elements. Newspapers have to be available at the right time and place, and people have to be capable of reading them. But *why* do people choose to read them? Is the choice virtually automatic once people attain a certain level of wealth and disposable income?

The research that might produce conclusive answers to such questions has not been done in India or elsewhere, so far as I know. My own belief, based on scraps of evidence and strong intuition, is that the essential missing ingredient is political involvement. The sequence runs like this. Conditions begin to change so that growing groups of people who were denied the right to participate in political decision-making begin to see such participation as possible and just. (Economic change may be behind what is going on, but these economic changes do not necessarily bring comfort and wealth; they may bring dislocation and uncertainty.) To be part of events that now excite them, and to be informed of the doings of people like themselves elsewhere, they seek information. They start using newspapers more extensively than ever before. People who produce newspapers respond by producing more

¹⁷ *Statistical Outline of India, 1995-6* (Bombay: Tata Services, 1996), p. 18.

¹⁸ *PII, 1963*, pp. 237-41. David Butler *et al.*, *India Decides, 1952-95*, 3rd edition (New Delhi: Books and Things, 1995), p. 155.

¹⁹ For a more detailed discussion of Oriya newspapers and Orissa, which is one of India's least developed states, Robin Jeffrey, "Oriya: 'Identifying ... with Newspapers'", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 15 March 1997, pp. 511-14.

and introducing better technology to do so; and new newspapers are created to meet the demand. Newspaper producers, who have always sold advertisements, inform people with things to sell that their newspapers have larger audiences and therefore more potential customers. And among readers themselves, the ability to be seen reading a newspaper – even to have one's own newspaper under one's arm – becomes a mark of distinction, worth sacrificing a cup of tea to enjoy.

What is my evidence for such assertions? Historically, I am attracted to the example of Britain at the time of the Chartist movement in the 1830s and '40s when newspaper circulations grew (in spite of the high price of newspapers), and mass movements of working-class people demanded a place in the political system. Similarly, the United States in the decade before the Civil War reached newspaper penetration exceeding thirty dailies to 1,000 people, comparable to that of Chartist Britain.²⁰ These were the Americans who bought tens of thousands of copies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and whose minds were shaped in ways that sustained a mass-based, four-year "people's" war. India by 1996 had a ratio of more than forty dailies to 1,000 people (see Fig. 1.2). Newspaper consumption, I believe, had reached a level to confirm that significant change in the conduct of politics was going on throughout the country.

Let me carry this numbers game a little further. If we assume that a quarter of our 1,000 cohort of the *entire* population was too young or infirm to be potential readers, we reach a figure of perhaps twenty adults for every daily newspaper printed in India in the mid-1990s. Anyone who has watched the turnover of a newspaper at a Kerala tea-stall will recognize that the number of readers of a single newspaper can be very large. The Tamil daily *Dina Thanthi*, for example, had survey results to show that an average of eighteen people read each copy in 1997.²¹

The example of Kerala reinforces my belief that politics is the key in provoking people to buy newspapers. Throughout the twentieth century, the Malayalam-speaking region on the southwestern coast has been

²⁰ Bagdikian, *Information Machine*, p. 48. Turner, *Shocking History*, p. 101. Ivon Asquith, "The Structure, Ownership and Control of the Press, 1780-1855" in George Boyce, James Curran and Pauline Wingate (eds), *Newspaper History* (London: Constable, 1978), pp. 100-2.

²¹ Indian Readership Survey 1998 (IRS-98), based on fieldwork in 1997, attributed 8.3 million readers to *Dina Thanthi*, whose audited circulation was 473,000 copies. *Economic Times*, 6-12 January 1999, p. 3. *ABC July-December 1997*. Joseph Addison reckoned in 1711 that twenty people read each copy of the famed *Spectator*. *Spectator*, 12 March 1711, quoted in Alexander M. Witherspoon (ed.), *The College Survey of English Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1951), p. 535.

the most literate place in India. The reasons need not concern us here;²² but by the 1930s Kerala, though desperately poor, had a high-level of political expectation and involvement, focussed on bitter competition among the Indian National Congress, the Communist Party and sectarian organizations of religions and castes. In 1960, the year of a mid-term state election which produced the highest voter turnout in Indian history (84 per cent) and resulted in the defeat of the Communists, Malayalam newspaper penetration was roughly thirty-five newspapers for every 1,000 people; India's overall newspaper penetration was about twelve to 1,000.²³ Yet Kerala's *per capita* income was well below the lowly all-India average. By 1996, newspaper penetration of Malayalam was more than eighty-five dailies to 1,000 people, twice the all-India ratio, even though Kerala's *per capita* income stayed below the national average.²⁴ Kerala's politics remained fiercely competitive: the government changed at all but one of the eleven elections between 1957 and 1996.

Crude measures from the rest of India support a hypothesis that, in making people into newspaper readers, literacy and political participation precede raw purchasing power and advanced printing technology. The fastest growth rates in newspaper circulation between 1971 and 1991 were in states which showed the strongest *growth rates of literacy*, not of *per capita* economic growth. These were the states of Orissa and the Oriya language, Uttar Pradesh and Hindi, Andhra Pradesh and Telugu, Karnataka and Kannada.²⁵ States that already had relatively high literacy in 1971, and where the *rate* of literacy growth in the next twenty years was slow (Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra) had a high rate of *per capita* economic growth, a suggestion that literacy fosters economic development. Marathi, Tamil and Malayalam had slow *growth rates* in daily newspaper circulations, again suggesting that the condition of people's finances is not the key factor in determining whether they buy newspapers.

Such "evidence" of course is thin and flawed. But it helps to correct simplistic notions that economic growth alone is essential for newspapers to grow. Literacy is essential, and literacy may well *precede* notable

²² See, for example, Robin Jeffrey, "Culture and Governments: How Women Made Kerala Literate", *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 60, no. 4 (fall 1987), pp. 447-72, and Robin Jeffrey, *Politics, Women and Well-Being: How Kerala Became "a Model"* (London: Macmillan, 1992).

²³ *PII*, 1963, Part 1, p. 207.

²⁴ Kerala's population in 1996 was estimated at 31 million; daily newspaper circulations in Malayalam at 2.7 million. *SOI*, 1997-8, p. 38. *PII*, 1997, p. 30.

²⁵ It would be misguided to labour this rough statistical exercise. It can do no more than suggest and imply. It is based on the "State Domestic Product and Per Capita Income" tables in the *Statistical Outline of India* (various years) and the census data on literacy from the same volumes.

economic growth. And a literate population, in which there are glaring disparities in wealth and status, is poised to discover that the “right” of “the people” to participate in politics is one of the seemingly irreversible givens of the modern world. In these conditions, newspapers and newspaper-reading expand. In the choice between a cup of tea and a newspaper, many more now choose the newspaper. And if you have the newspaper, others will sometimes buy the tea.

Printing

If you have large numbers of literate people, politically interested and able either to buy or see a newspaper, what else is necessary? The answer is in the tail of the question: people must be able to obtain a newspaper. Because of the nature of Indian scripts and the development of printing since the fifteenth century, a revolution in technology was necessary to make Indian scripts effective for newspaper production – in short, to make print in India a *mass* medium.

The scripts of India’s languages have the same origins and are founded on the same principles (Urdu, written in the Perso-Arabic script, is the exception). The script was called Brahmi and dated from the third century BCE. Subsequently, over hundreds of years, various languages evolved scripts of their own, which were widely used by literate elites long before the arrival of Europeans in the sixteenth century. In both north and south India, these scripts took on distinctive characteristics apparently dictated by the materials on which they were written. In the north, writing was done either as carving in stone or “with Indian ink on paper or birch-bark.”²⁶ Lines needed to be straight; curves were hard to do. In the south, on the other hand, writing was on palm leaves where straight lines were “likely to tear the...leaves... Thus developed a cursory style.”²⁷ Thus when the printing press arrived, India’s most influential people already had long-established scripts to which they were deeply attached.

These scripts elegantly represented sounds, but that very elegance made them uncomfortable partners for the printing press that Gutenberg and his descendants devised for the Roman alphabet. In the Indian scripts, every sound has its own symbol, and a particular symbol represents a single, never-varied sound. Someone familiar solely with the anomalies of English – where a person who touches a *live* wire will not *live* long – will be amazed at the faithful marriage of sound and symbol. To achieve this elegance, however, a large number of “conjunct”

²⁶ Shackle in *Cambridge Encyclopedia of India*, p. 407.

²⁷ T. P. Meenakshisundaran, “The Scripts of South India” in *Indian Systems of Writing* (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1966), pp. 23-4.

symbols are necessary – distinctive letters comprising elements of two consonants. For example, “p” + “r” is written in English as “pr,” but in the Indian scripts, the sound requires a new character of its own. In Hindi प + र is written as प्र : in Malayalam, പ + ര is written as പ്ര. If a person is writing by hand, the formation of such conjuncts is easy. To convert such conjuncts to Gutenberg’s printing press, however, presents difficulties which hobbled the development of printing in India.

The first book printed in India was said to have been done by the Portuguese in Goa in 1556. A copy of another still exists, published in Goa in 1559, only a century after Gutenberg began to work with movable type in Europe. In an Indian language, the earliest surviving printing is in Tamil, a 16-page tract called “Christian Doctrine”, published by Portuguese priests in Quilon on the Kerala coast in 1578.²⁸ It was another two hundred years, however, before printing in Indian languages burgeoned. Protestant Christian missionaries, lusting to convert India to Christianity, cast type in Bengali in 1773 and brought out a Bengali book in 1778. They cast Perso-Arabic type in 1779, and by 1799, we are told, John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* was available in Tamil.²⁹

But Indian scripts needed a revolution in technology to liberate their potential for printing. To realize why, we need to understand the two sides of the printing process. The first is composition – getting words into a form ready for reproduction. The second is printing – getting the words onto multiple sheets of paper.

Type in all scripts, including Roman, was composed by hand till the 1880s. First, types had to be made. Metal moulds were manufactured for each letter – twenty-six lower-case shapes in Roman, plus upper case, punctuation marks and numerals. Molten lead was poured into hundreds of such casts, just as one pours hot jelly into a mould. When the metal cooled, the individual characters were knocked out and placed in a case – a large drawer divided into compartments – with a separate section for each character. To set type, compositors sat or stood at the case. They had the written copy next to them and in their hand, a printer’s stick, an L-shaped piece of wood with a raised ledge against which they packed the type. From the case, the compositor took individual letters and laid them next to each other on the stick to form words and so put together – composed – lines and paragraphs. Blocks of type were transferred to a galley, a column of assembled type, which was eventually locked together with other columns in a chase – a metal frame holding an entire page. Ultimately, these raised letters, organized in columns and coated with ink, were pressed against paper.

²⁸ B. S. Kesavan, *History of Printing and Publishing in India*, vol. I (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1985), pp. 18-19, 22-3.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 183, 420-3.

Because Indian scripts created a unique symbol for every spoken sound, the number of characters ran to hundreds and approached a thousand in some languages. A printer's case for an English font³⁰ might consist of eighty *compartments*, made up of twenty-six upper-case and twenty-six lower-case letters, numerals from 0 to 9 and some punctuation marks. For an Indian language, a printer's case for a single font thus had to consist of a minimum of 300 or 400 *compartments*.

To manufacture type in the Indian scripts – “the complexity of the Bengali alphabet presents a formidable challenge”, concluded one observer³¹ – required commitment of effort and money. The economics were obvious: more letters meant more moulds in which the letters were manufactured, and the consumption of more metal. More complexity meant the need for finer, more ornate shapes in which hair's-breadth metal lines easily broke. Roman script could be made smaller than complex Indian-language characters and still be legible and unbreakable.³² Christian missionaries, keen to print the Bible and religious propaganda, often had the commitment and skills to manufacture Indian-language types; but large investments of money, which led to innovations in printing in Europe and the United States, were not available in India. Once one or two fonts were available in an Indian language, there was little incentive to improve them and create the attractive, efficient printing that is the goal of typographical design.

In the United States and Europe, the invention in the 1880s of machines to cast type as required represented the breakthrough in composition that governed newspaper production for the next ninety years. Such machines allowed an operator at a keyboard to release molten lead into moulds to form lines of type. By hand a skilled printer could compose a line of type a minute; a Linotype machine, in contrast, set type at more than five lines a minute.³³ Most English-language newspapers in India introduced type-casting machines around the time of the First World War.³⁴ But neither Linotype nor Monotype, the two great

³⁰ A font is a type style – the size of the type and the shape or style of the letters.

³¹ Kesavan, *History*, vol. 1, p. 177.

³² Type size is measured in “points”. One inch (2.54 cm.) is 72 points measured from the top of an ascender (the vertical stroke of a “b,” for example) to the bottom of a descender (the tail of a “y” or a “g”).

³³ Bagdikian, *Information Machines*, p. 92. James Moran, *Printing Presses: History and Development from the Fifteenth Century to Modern Times* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), pp. 101-11, for the evolution of printing.

³⁴ S. Natarajan, *History of the Press*, p. 210. Kesavan, *History*, vol. 1, p. 225, writes that the *Statesman* of Calcutta introduced Linotype machines in 1896, but Milton Israel, *Communications and Power. Propaganda and the Press in the Indian Nationalist Struggle, 1920-47* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), p. 197, suggests that *Amrita Bazar Patrika* had Linotypes “years before” Calcutta's English-language newspapers.

manufacturers of these “hot-metal” machines, considered it profitable to make machines for Indian scripts. The scripts themselves presented special and expensive problems: no type-casting machine could contain more than 250 different characters, too few to do justice to Indian languages as they then were written. And too few Indian-language newspapers looked likely to be able to afford the costly, clanking, hot-lead-squirting mammoths called generically “Linotypes”.

Bengali was the first Indian script to have international companies invest in it when the Linotype Company delivered a hot-lead casting machine in 1935. Other Indian scripts, including Devanagari, did not get hot-metal machines until after the Second World War when the Monotype Company, using a slightly different and cheaper technique, captured most Indian scripts deemed wealthy enough to merit manufacturing the equipment.³⁵ Oriya seems to have been the last of the Indian scripts to get hot-metal typesetting (from the Linotype company) in the mid-1970s, by which time the technology was obsolete.³⁶

Composition of type – whether by hand, by machine or ultimately, as we shall see, by computer – is only one side of printing. The other side is the press – the means by which the image of the type is transferred to multiple sheets of paper. Gutenberg’s original “press” was “a converted wine press that instead of pushing grape against grape was made to push inked type against paper”.³⁷ Between the 1450s and 1950s, the printing press experienced two major innovations. The cylinder press, introduced to print *The Times* of London in 1814, rolled sheets of paper across a flat type surface and could turn out 1,100 sheets an hour, close to five times more than a hand-press. And the *rotary* press, introduced at *The Times* in 1869, used a curved metal plate, made by “stereotyping” – pouring molten metal into a curved mould of papier mâché. The paper mould was made by pressing a wet papier mâché “dough” over a composed page of metal type to produce a perfect impression of the page. The dough, having dried to the consistency of a cardboard egg carton, could be bent into a semi-circle, into which hot lead was poured. The resulting curved metal plate was fixed to the press where its inked image spun continuously against a fast-flowing and unbroken ribbon

³⁵ Promotional video, viewed at Ananda Bazar Patrika, Calcutta, 7 January 1994. *Press Commission, 1954*, Part 1, p. 109. Interview, Ranendra Sinha Roy, Senior Regional Sales Manager, Monotype India, Calcutta, 8 January 1994. The Monotype process cast individual letters; Linotype cast complete lines of type. Monotype was more difficult to handle in the composing room. *Gujarat Samachar* introduced Monotype machines in 1953. Interview, Nirmam Shah, Executive Editor *Gujarat Samachar*, Ahmedabad, 1 February 1999.

³⁶ Interview, K. C. Tripathi, Editor, *Samaj*, Cuttack, 30 December 1993. Similarly, the Tamil daily *Dinamalar* introduced Linotype machines only in the mid-1970s. Interview, R. Krishnamurthy, Editor *Dinamalar*, Chennai, 19 January 1999.

³⁷ Bagdikian, *Information Machines*, p. 93.

of paper. By the end of the nineteenth century, the biggest rotary presses could print 12,000 sheets an hour.³⁸

But rotary presses were complex and expensive. India's English-language newspapers began to introduce them only at the time of the First World War, and by 1974, though most "big" newspapers used rotaries, the flat-bed cylinder, introduced at *The Times* in 1814, was the mainstay of the majority of Indian daily newspapers.³⁹ Indeed, economic policy encouraged import substitution, and in the late 1960s, Hindustan Machine Tools, a state-run industry, "started manufacturing flat bed cylindrical printing units"; but "the prices are higher than those of imported machines."⁴⁰ In 1973, government banned the import of any printing equipment already made in India.⁴¹

At the time of the first Press Commission in 1953, printing in most Indian languages was slow and unattractive. In some scripts, the fonts had not improved for years. These large, rough-hewn types – seldom smaller than 12 points (one-sixth of an inch from the top of the highest ascending character to the bottom of the lowest descending character) – could get far fewer words into a column than the Roman alphabet. Benefiting from a less intricate script and refined over a hundred years of investment and experiment, English could get 1,400 words into a column; Bengali 700; and Oriya 500.⁴² English had hundreds of type-face styles to work with; some Indian scripts had only one.

These circumstances did not change markedly for the next 25 years. Another government inquiry in 1965 confirmed that India's printing equipment was antiquated. The Gurmukhi script, for example, in which Punjabi was increasingly written, had only a single 12-point font, leaving no scope for headlines or display (a quiet headline in an English tabloid starts at 48 point).⁴³ Close to 60 per cent of 372 daily newspapers surveyed in 1965 still set type by hand. Production of even a modest eight-page broadsheet had therefore to begin eighteen hours before the

³⁸ Moran, *Printing Press*, pp. 105-08, 181-94.

³⁹ S. Natarajan, *History of the Press*, p. 210. *Report of the Fact-Finding Committee on Newspaper Economics, 1975* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1975), p. 386. 55 out of 64 "big" newspapers had rotaries, but nine did not! A survey of 31 smaller dailies found only nine had rotary presses. *Problems of Small Newspapers: an Analytical Study*. (New Delhi: All-India Newspaper Editors' Conference, n.d. [?1972]), pp. 9-12.

⁴⁰ *Problems of Small Newspapers*, p. 84.

⁴¹ John A. Lent, *Newspapers in Asia: Contemporary Trends and Problems* (Hong Kong: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983), p. 6.

⁴² *Press Commission, 1954*, Part 1, p. 51.

⁴³ *Report of the Inquiry Committee on Small Newspapers, 1965* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information, 1966), pp. 49, 79-84.

paper was ready for the hawkers.⁴⁴ An experienced English printer, struck by the ancient presses and damaged type that formed the mainstay of many printing operations, especially in Indian languages, wrote that one shop he visited “bore more resemblance to a scrap-yard than to a printing house and appeared to specialize in completely illegible products”.⁴⁵

That was in 1977. Yet by 1985, the editor of India’s leading printing magazine was declaring that “an industry ... has awakened. The modernisation of India’s printing industry is one of the country’s major success stories.”⁴⁶ Two printing innovations arrived in India simultaneously at the end of Mrs Gandhi’s “emergency”: computer typesetting and the “offset” press. Their arrival resulted from a particular combination of social and political circumstances.

Revolution

On the night of 25/26 June 1975, Mrs Gandhi proclaimed an “emergency”, police shut off the power to New Delhi’s street of newspapers, and by the time India awoke on the morning of 26 June, authoritarian rule and censorship had been imposed that were to last for nineteen months. Tight control of foreign exchange, and government attempts to reduce imports of newsprint and restrict the size of newspapers in the early 1970s, had already led to “some recession in the advertising market”.⁴⁷ The censorship of the “emergency” produced boring newspapers and falling circulations. Printing, publishing and newspapers were never more depressed or depressing.

Yet inside the bottle into which Mrs Gandhi had jammed a cork in 1975, immense curiosity built up. Once she was defeated in the 1977 elections, tens of millions of people searched eagerly for news of what had happened around them in the previous nineteen months. The forcible family-planning campaign exemplified the way in which millions of people were frog-marched into awareness of the modern state and infected with a desire to know about, and try to influence, events that affected their lives. In three years – between the depths of the “emergency” in 1976 and 1979, the year before Mrs Gandhi returned to power – newspaper circulations rose 40 per cent for daily newspapers and 34

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 61.

⁴⁵ W.R. Durrant, London School of Printing, quoted in Graham Jones, *The Toiling Word: Nurturing a Healthy Press for India’s Rural Millions* (Zurich: International Press Institute, 1979), p. 36.

⁴⁶ V.N. Chhabra, “Indian Printing – Towards the 21st Century”, *Vidura*, vol. 22, no. 4 (August 1985), p. 201.

⁴⁷ *Problems of Small Newspapers*, p. 85.

per cent for periodicals. The sales of Hindi dailies surpassed those of English for the first time in 1979.⁴⁸

Such increases were notable, but they only hinted at the profound changes within the newspaper industry. The immense curiosity created by the "emergency" generated a market for anyone with a story to tell and a press to print it on. And the millions of literate people, able and eager to pay to read what happened to themselves and their neighbours, constituted a growing force whose preoccupations and goals provided subjects for journalists. People wanted to read about themselves.

By the late 1970s, moreover, millions of such Indians had relatives overseas who transported money and ideas to India. A comfortable class, informed by such transactions, wanted the comforts and techniques of relatives and friends in the West. The same people whom the "emergency" made insatiably curious became equally hungry for consumer comforts. Indian governments cautiously responded by easing controls and opening up cracks in the system of regulation, both of the domestic economy and foreign trade. The process, which began even with the Janata government that succeeded Mrs Gandhi in 1977, became marked from 1982, which her government declared "productivity year".

For the newspaper revolution, these developments had two consequences. First, it became possible to import printing equipment and technology.⁴⁹ Second, it became profitable – and necessary – to do so. As Indian capitalists saw growing profit in making and selling consumer goods, they looked for new markets and ways to reach them. Once a few Indian-language newspapers began to tap this expanding potential for advertising revenue, others followed to survive. The enviably diverse ownership of newspapers in India – it seems so to someone who has lived in Australia or worked in Canada – produced a competition reminiscent of New York in the 1890s when the city had twenty-five daily newspapers.⁵⁰ To get the advertisements, which provided the funds to improve the technology, newspapers had to prove they had readerships larger than their rivals. But to reach potential readers, printing methods had to change. The Indian scripts had to be liberated. They were. In

⁴⁸ *PII*, 1977, p. 39; *PII*, 1980, p. 52. Daily circulations reached 13 million in 1979; periodicals, 33 million. Hindi daily circulations in 1979 reached 2,997,000; English, 2,969,000.

⁴⁹ The Registrar of Newspapers for India, whose office examined applications to import printing equipment, approved imports worth Rs 22 million in 1982. It had begun to list such applications in its annual report only about 1980. *PII*, 1983, p. 4 and *PII*, 1981, p. 356. V.N. Chhabra, "New Printing Technology and Developing Countries", *Vidura*, vol. 19, no. 4 (August 1982), pp. 235-6, 261.

⁵⁰ Howard Kurtz, *Media Circus: The Trouble with America's Newspapers* (New York: Times Books, 1993), p. 324. W. A. Swanberg, *Citizen Hearst* (New York: Bantam, 1971; 1st published 1961), pp. 93-5.

1974 a survey of more than 200 daily newspapers located only six web-offset presses in India. By 1985 there were said to be 1,000.⁵¹

The twin prongs of the printing revolution – offset presses and computer typesetting – both emerged in the industrial world after the Second World War. The offset press came first, but it alone was not enough to liberate Indian scripts. Their freedom depended on the computer and computer typesetting.

An offset press transfers images photographically and chemically rather than physically. Offset printing and its grandparent, lithography (Greek *lithos* – stone; *graphos* – writing), were first used in Germany in the 1790s. They depend on the fact that water and grease repel each other and that grease will attract and hold oil-based inks. In lithography, images are traced onto a limestone slab with a greasy pen, and the slab is washed with water. When an oily ink is applied to the slab, it adheres only to the greasy marks, and washes clear from the area covered by water. When paper is pressed against the slab, the greasy-ink image is transferred to the paper. Though the process was slow – it could print only one page at a time – it was particularly suitable for the complex calligraphy of the Perso-Arabic script and was used from the nineteenth century – and still today – for much printing of Urdu.⁵²

The term “offset” comes from the invention of a faster way to use the technique. An aluminium plate, onto which the image for printing is transferred photographically, is substituted for the limestone slab. The plate is bent into a cylinder, and the spinning cylinder allows paper to be fed in a continuous skein – a “web”. The delicate image on the plate is not robust enough to stand up to high-speed printing, so it is “offset” – transferred – onto a water-coated rubber mat fixed round a second cylinder. The mat transfers the image onto the skein of paper. In the 1990s, Indian-made, relatively inexpensive offset presses allowed 30,000 copies of a twelve-page broadsheet newspaper to be produced in an hour.⁵³

Offset printing became popular for small newspapers in North America from the 1950s. In India, the first offset press is said to have arrived at the *Times of India* in Mumbai about 1950, but it was never effectively used and was eventually sold to Ramnath Goenka’s Indian Express

⁵¹ V.N. Chhabra, “Indian Printing – Towards the 21st Century”, *Vidura*, vol. 22, no. 4 (August 1985), pp. 201-02. *Report...Fact-Finding Committee*, p. 386.

⁵² Uma Dasgupta, *Rise of an Indian Public. Impact of Official Policy, 1870-80* (Calcutta: RDDHI, 1977), p. 39. See also Francis Robinson, “Islam and the Impact of Print in South Asia” in Nigel Crook (ed.), *The Transmission of Knowledge in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 62-97.

⁵³ Interview, Umaprasad Dutta, Manager Production Coordination, Ananda Bazar Patrika Limited, Calcutta, 7 January 1994. *Ananda Bazar Patrika* got 800,000 papers a night from seven presses.

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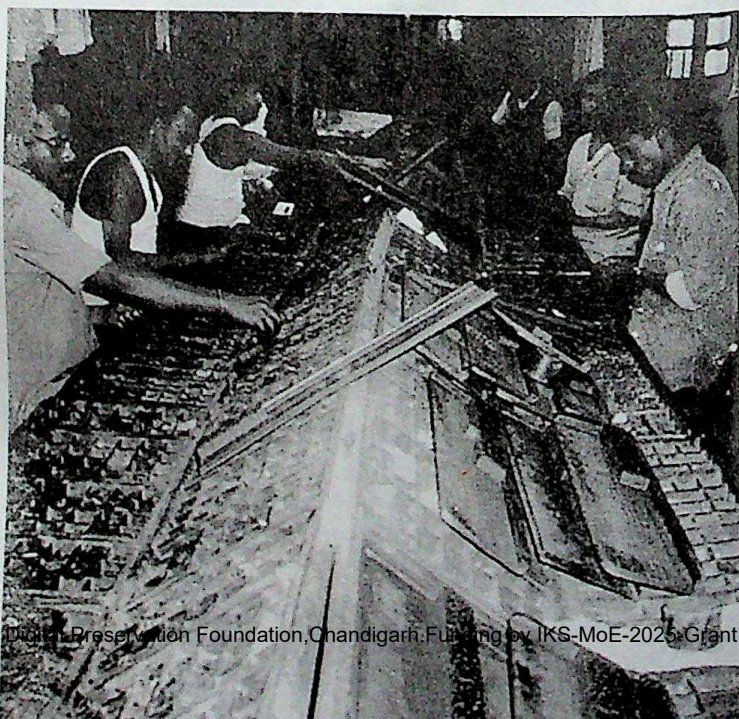


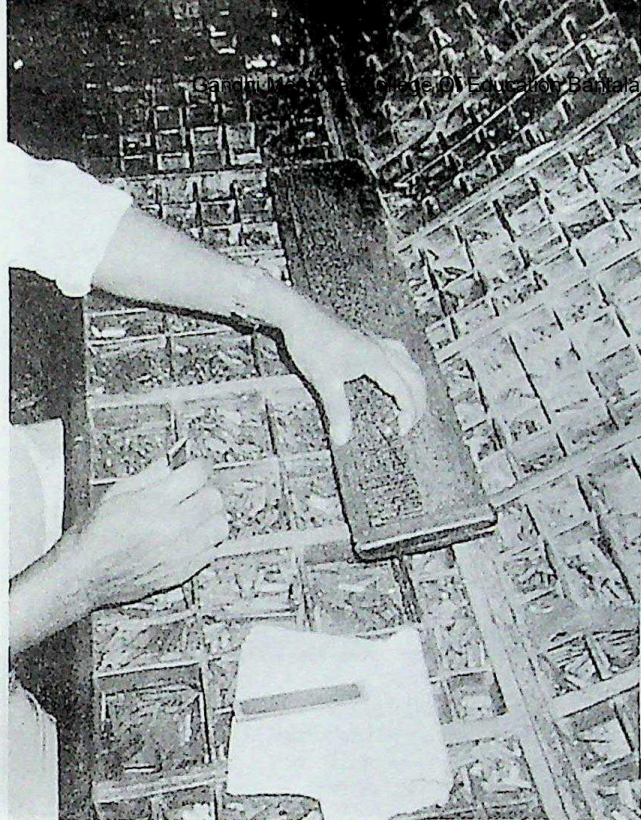
Above, the Mathrubhumi office, K.P.K. Menon Road, Calicut, *Below*, sandals outside the computer room at Samaj, Cuttack, December 1993.





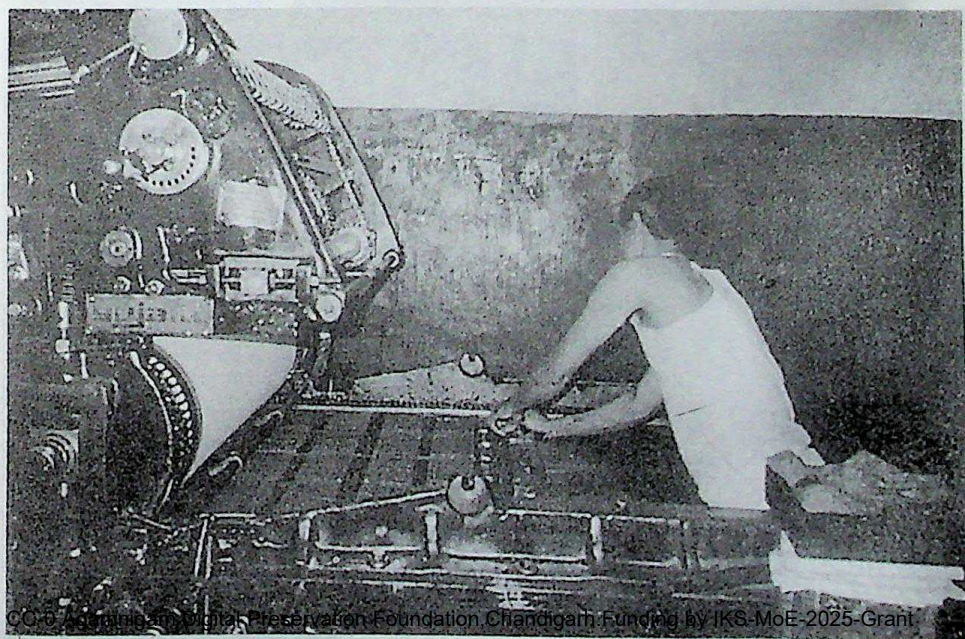
Above, making Oriya type by hand at *Prajatantra*, Cuttack, December 1993.
Below, handsetting in Oriya at *Samaj*, Cuttack, December 1993.

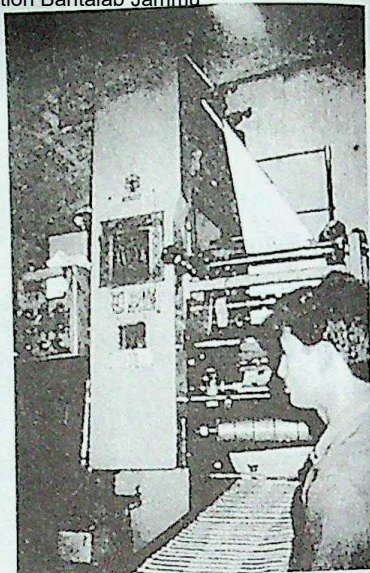
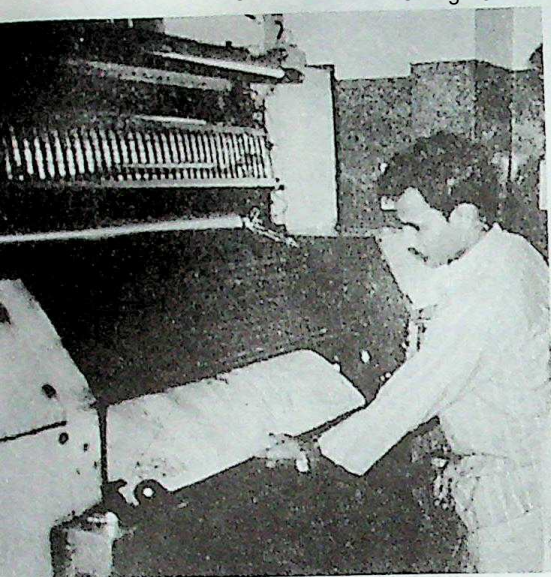




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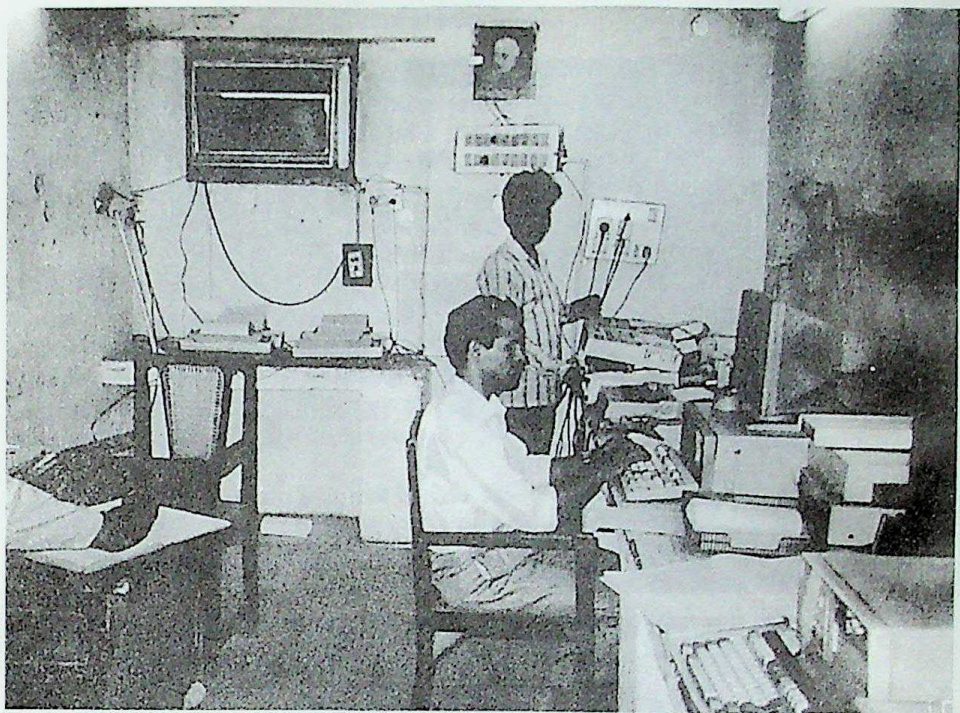
Above, a printer's stick, case and copy to be set, *Samaj*, Cuttack, December 1993. Below, flatbed cylinder press, *Prajatantra*, Cuttack, January 1994.



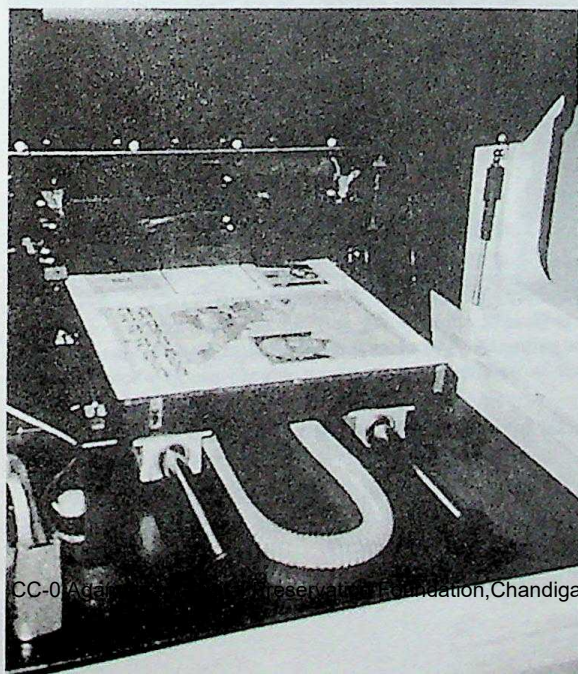


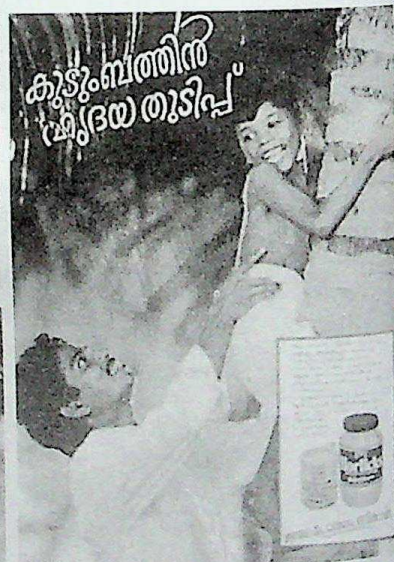
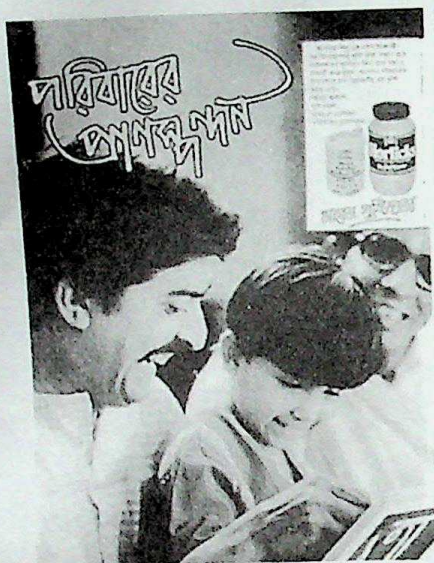
Left above, fitting an offset plate, Eenadu, Rajahmundry, March 1993. Right above, the finished product: folded newspapers at Samaj, Cuttack, December 1993. Below, the web of paper races through an offset press at Eenadu.





Above, computer operators set copy in Devanagari at *Dainik Jagran*, Kanpur, May 1993. Below, full-page facsimile allows *Eenadu* headquarters in Hyderabad to send entire pages to printing centres elsewhere in Andhra Pradesh.





chain, where it also lay idle.⁵⁴ As we have seen, by the early 1970s there were no more than half a dozen offset presses being used for newspapers in the whole of India. This constituted a perverse blessing: the antiquated printing equipment of most Indian-language newspapers did not represent a huge capital investment that owners were reluctant to discard.

Indian companies began manufacturing offset presses about 1975.⁵⁵ One adapted the Goss Community Press, an American model, and called it the "Orient", which became the workhorse of Indian newspapers. Another company collaborated with East German manufacturers to make a press called the Corroset.⁵⁶ Thus when the "emergency" ended, presses suited to the needs of Indian newspapers were becoming available. A newspaper did not have to suffer the frustration, the paperwork and the questions about foreign exchange that went with importing equipment from overseas.⁵⁷

But offset printing had no great benefit for Indian languages so long as type still had to be cast in hot metal or composed painstakingly by hand. The personal computer broke these shackles by simplifying the requirements and reducing the costs of photocomposition. Coupled with offset presses, computers eventually gave Indian scripts the same possibilities for speed, design and economy as the Roman script.

Computer-based photocomposing was widely used by the 1970s in English-speaking countries around the world, and the potential of the technology was well known. "The linkage of computers and photocomposition", wrote Ben Bagdikian in 1971, "will revolutionize the production of all images. [...] But the conversion will not be simple and quick."⁵⁸ The technology as it then existed was expensive, complicated and confined to the Roman script. Strongly discouraging imports, Indian policy held that "it is premature to think of highly sophisticated technology in a country where 40 per cent of the population live below the poverty line."⁵⁹ In any case, the big international manufacturers like Monotype and Linotype could see little reward in developing photocomposing programs for the limited markets that Indian languages

⁵⁴ Interview, P.K. Roy, Editor-in-Chief, *Aajkal*, Calcutta, 29 December 1993.

⁵⁵ See the obituary of K. D. Kohli (1897-1997) in *Printing Times*, May-June 1997, p. 46.

⁵⁶ Interview, T.P.G. Nair, Production Manager, *Aj*, Varanasi, 11 January 1994. Nair trained in Germany and got his first job with the Manubhai company of Kolhapur in 1969. Manubhai began making the Corroset in 1975, according to Nair. The Kohli company – The Printer's House – began producing an adaptation of the Goss Community Press about the same time.

⁵⁷ *Mass Media in India, 1980-1* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1982), pp. 10-11.

⁵⁸ Bagdikian, *Information Machines*, pp. 95-6.

⁵⁹ *Report...Fact-Finding*, p. 61.

seemed to represent.⁶⁰ Great change, however, was in store. In 1980, not a single daily was reported to be using photocomposition; by 1987, there were more than 100.⁶¹

Indian-language newspaper owners, aware of what the technology could do and sensing from their circulation figures a potential boom, were "ready and anxious to acquire the new technology".⁶² In 1978, a number of newspapers formed the Research Institute for Newspaper Development (RIND), and appointed as director C.G.K. Reddy (1921-94), ex-Indian National Army, socialist, founder-editor of the *Deccan Herald* and one-time fugitive from Mrs Gandhi's police for an alleged bomb conspiracy during the "emergency".⁶³ By October 1980, RIND's collaborator, the National Centre for Software Development and Computing Techniques in Mumbai, had produced a "design information kit" for computer-based photocomposition in Devanagari.⁶⁴ By June 1981, similar manuals were published for Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam.⁶⁵

The figures of the Registrar of Newspapers for India, the unit of the central government set up in 1957 to oversee newspapers, are never precise, but they are often indicative and always intriguing.⁶⁶ The import of printing equipment, which had to be approved by the Registrar, became significant only after the "emergency" ended in 1977. In the following year, he received seventy-two applications to import equipment; he approved fifty, worth Rs 6.2 crores (US \$7 million by the exchange rates of the day).⁶⁷ Over the next ten years, the Registrar approved about 150 applications to import equipment (after 1985, no

⁶⁰ S.P. Mudur, L.S. Wakankar, P.K. Ghosh, *Design Information on Text Composition in Devanagari* (Bombay: National Centre for Software Development and Computing Techniques, 1980), pp. iii, 2.

⁶¹ *PII*, 1981, pp. 129-30. *PII*, 1988, pp. 151-2. The Second Press Commission reported that one daily was using photo-composition in 1979. *Report of the Second Press Commission*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Controller of Publications, Government of India, 1982), p. 131.

⁶² Mudur et al., *Design Information...Devanagari*, p. ix.

⁶³ Interview, C. G. K. Reddy, Bangalore, 19 April 1993.

⁶⁴ Mudur et al., *Design Information...Devanagari*, p. iv.

⁶⁵ T.N.V. Reddy, *Design Information on Text Composition in Kannada* (Bangalore: Electronic Technology Company, 1981). P.V.H.M.L. Narasimham, G.L. Narasimham, G. Ramakrishna Rao, *Design Information on Text Composition in Telugu* (Secunderabad: Computer Maintenance Corporation, 1981). H. Ganesh, P.R. Krishnan, K.S.N. Pillai, *Design Information on Text Composition in Malayalam* (Trivandrum: Electronics Research and Development Centre and State Institute of Languages, 1981). RIND was the co-publisher of all the titles. Tamil was omitted because it does not have conjunct forms – i.e. it is more like the Roman alphabet with one letter following, not going above or below. As a result, adequate photo-composing methods in Tamil already existed.

⁶⁶ The annual report has for years embodied the limitations of Indian printing.

⁶⁷ *PII*, 1979, p. 7.

application appears to have been rejected) valued at more than US \$20 million (allowing for the varying exchange rates over the period). In the same period, the Registrar noted that newspapers using photocomposing equipment went from none in 1980 to fourteen in 1982 and 140 in 1991, the year in which the report stopped bothering to count.⁶⁸

To explain the technical achievements, Indian specialists distinguish between the “graphic” way in which the Roman alphabet works and the “phonetic” principle of the Indian-language scripts. Each of the twenty-six English letters has a shape that never changes, but it may represent a variety of sounds – thus it has a “graphic” consistency but a “phonetic” inconsistency. Indian-language scripts are different: a letter always represents the same sound. When two or three sounds join, a new composite letter is formed.

The RIND initiative set out to create a phonetic system that would be suitable for every Indian-language script except Perso-Arabic. The Indian Script Standard Codes for Information Interchange (ISSCII)⁶⁹ provides a keyboard symbol for each of the sixty or so sounds individually present in Indian languages. When two sounds come together – for example, the “p” + “r” combination I used as an earlier illustration – the computer program calls for the keyboard operator to strike the “ṙ” key, then a special link character set in the middle of the keyboard, and the “ṛ” key. The computer program creates the correct combined character “ṛ” (“pr”) to represent the composite sound.⁷⁰ In the old days of hot metal or hand-set type, all such composite letters had to be manufactured and physically stored – in the printer’s case. With computers, characters exist only in the computer’s memory. They are created on screen only when the keyboard operator calls for them and printed only when they have been edited and formatted to the desired appearance. A multitude of combinations is possible because they have to be programmed into the software only once; they do not have to be constantly manufactured out of metal. In computer memory, Indian scripts can exist in all their intricacy and in a wide variety of styles and sizes.

The Devanagari script is more than two thousand years old, and other Indian-language scripts go back at least a thousand years.⁷¹ Some Indians resented the need to bend and break their written languages to satisfy the demands of metal type. Kirti Trivedi, a leading graphic artist active in redesigning Indian-language newspapers, wrote:

⁶⁸ *PIIs* for relevant years from 1979. This information is recorded under a section labelled “printing machinery”.

⁶⁹ As opposed to ASCII – American Standard Code for Information Interchange.

⁷⁰ I found Narasimham *et al.*, *Design Information...Telugu*, pp. 9-16, especially helpful in clarifying the process.

⁷¹ Christopher Shackle in *Cambridge Encyclopedia of India*, pp. 402-05.

Each [Devanagari] letter has been given a distinct personality as a goddess ...

That the letters of the alphabet should be chosen to be represented as deities, gives an indication of the great reverence attached to letterforms in India ...

Every letterform, thus is an integral icon, its totality consisting of its sound, its shape and its meaning ...

As *mantras* – sacred prayer syllables – letters of the alphabet link the worshipper to an intended divine principle ...

With such a profound history, rich in meaning and philosophy, it is difficult to talk about the development of letterforms for printing and typography in India, without a feeling of regret and sadness.

The letterform ... has undergone so much erosion and mutilation in the process of submitting to the demands and constraints of technology so as to lose a great deal of the original vigour and meaning ...

An integral icon can not be broken into its components, and still be considered [the] same. An image of Durga is much more than a collection of many limbs.⁷²

Trivedi's remarks resonate with regret at the state of Indian-language scripts and with desire to reclaim and revive them. If a person of Trivedi's age (he was born in 1948) had such feelings, no doubt many millions of Indians had been repelled by the print versions of the languages they learned to write and read. In saying this, one must recognize that the religious associations accompanying these sentiments about scripts can be turned to political purposes – creating a glorious past to mobilize people for violence in a grimy present. Yet the yearning for more empathetic ways of writing Indian scripts seems beyond doubt, and the fulfilment of that yearning, which computer typesetting allowed, contributed to the success of Indian-language newspapers from the late 1970s. "The new technological developments in typesetting", Trivedi wrote, "have finally removed all constraints which inhibited the development of Devanagari script. ... the new Devanagari seeds will sprout again."⁷³

One other technical development was necessary to allow Indian-language newspapers to begin to reach the potential audience in small towns and countryside. Just as computer typesetting and offset presses liberated Indian scripts, the computer modem, which allowed the transmission of "print" along telephone lines, overcame distance. A personal computer and modem made it possible to send a story hundreds of miles in a few seconds and to have it arrive in a form quickly turned into print on paper – print in Indian-language scripts. Now that offset presses were Indian-made and affordable, it became feasible to open newspaper production centres in smaller towns and to supply them with

⁷² Kirti Trivedi, "Iconography of Letterforms", paper presented at Type 90, Oxford, England, 1990. Interview, Kirti Trivedi, Professor, Industrial Design Centre, Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay, 28 April 1993.

⁷³ Trivedi, "Iconography of Letterforms."

copy from the newspaper's headquarters. A daily newspaper was thus brought many hours closer to the people who might want to read it.

The transformation of the respected Marathi daily *Sakal* typified the process unfolding at dozens of newspapers around India in the 1980s. The dowager daily of Pune, founded in 1932 to advance the nationalist cause, *Sakal* grew from two editions (Pune and Mumbai) and a circulation of 95,000 in 1976 to four editions (Pune, Mumbai, Kolhapur and Nasik) and 310,000 copies in 1996.⁷⁴ Having acquired offset presses, *Sakal* in Pune introduced two photocomposing terminals in the Devanagari script, made by the Linotype Company, in April 1984. Together, they cost Rs 300,000 (about US \$30,000 at that time). *Sakal* later added four more terminals, locally made, using IBM-compatible software developed in Mumbai with the help of the Linotype Company.⁷⁵

Until 1984, *Sakal*'s correspondents outside Pune were lucky if they had access to Roman teleprinters for which they might write their stories in Marathi using Roman script. This Romanized Marathi was rewritten by hand in the Pune office in Marathi script before being sent for typesetting by hot-metal Linotype machines. About 1989 personal computers changed the whole process. A correspondent in a district town could write a story in Devanagari script on his personal computer and transmit it by a telephone modem to Pune. The story was transferred to computer disk, given to a sub-editor at a terminal who brought it to the screen, edited and formatted it and then had it printed out as camera-ready copy to be pasted into its designated place on a page. The page, once completed, was photographed and made into a plate for the offset press. The story was typed only once – by the original writer using the Devanagari script in which Marathi is written. Using the new technology, *Sakal* started an edition in Nasik in 1989. By personal computer, modem and telephone line, editions in Mumbai, Kolhapur, Nasik and Pune exchanged stories in Devanagari which were edited to the local requirements of each edition.⁷⁶

Sakal also illustrated the way in which newspapers increasingly sat at the junction where politics and capitalism met. In 1985 the family of Sharad Pawar, frequent Chief Minister of Maharashtra, bought the newspaper. Annual turnover increased by five times in the next seven years, reaching Rs 300 million in 1992.⁷⁷ The story of *Sakal* repeated itself at newspapers across India, as Figure 2.1 suggests. Between 1976

⁷⁴ *ABC January-June 1976* and *ABC January-June 1996*.

⁷⁵ Interview, Ramdas Dhamne, *Sakal*, Pune, 16 March 1993. The advantages for Linotype lay in having their equipment regarded as the industry standard for Devanagari. Specialists at *Sakal* enthused about the "marvellous" qualities of Linotype's Devanagari font.

⁷⁶ *ABC January-June 1984*, p.7.

⁷⁷ Interview, P.G. Pawar, Managing Director, *Sakal*, 19 March 1993.

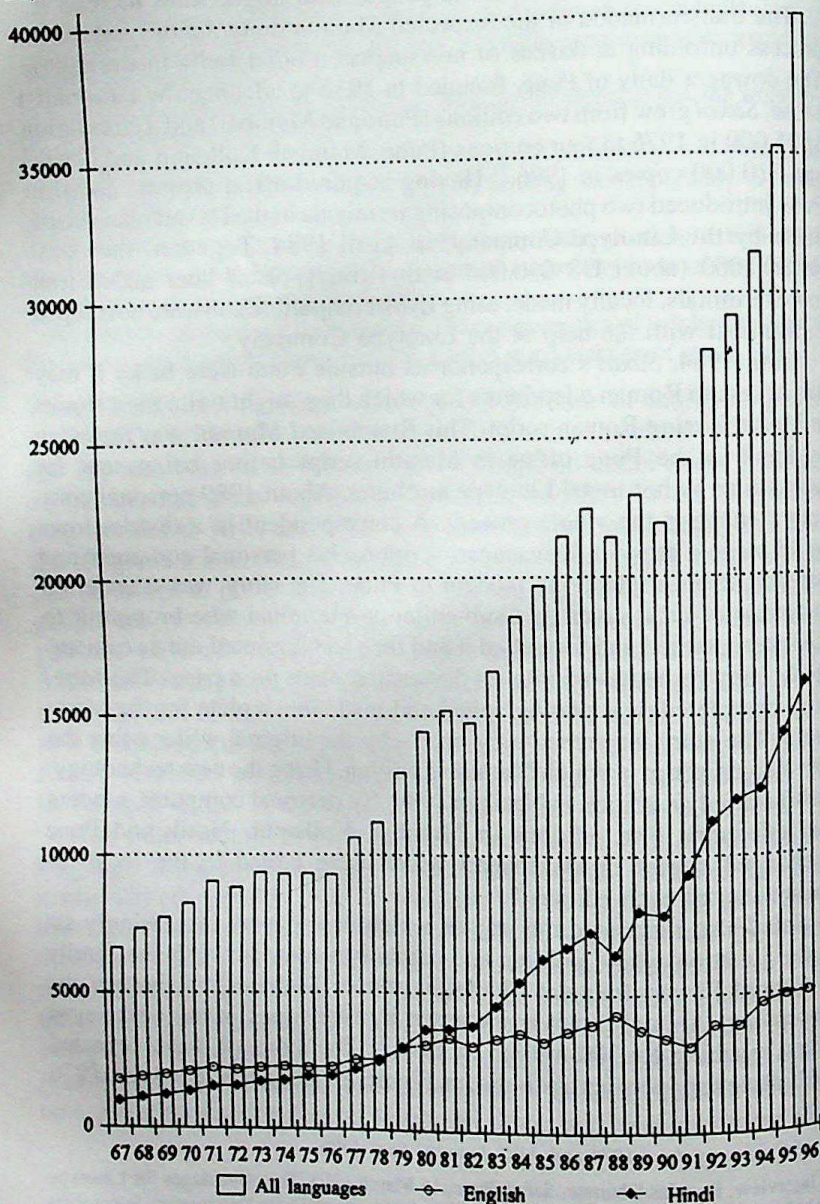
Copies per day
x 1,000

Figure 2.1.
DAILIES: ALL LANGUAGES, ENGLISH AND HINDI, 1967-96

and 1995, daily newspaper circulations grew at an annual average of 15 per cent – from 9.3 million papers a day to 35.5 million.⁷⁸

Of the measurements available to interpret the impact of newspapers, calculation of the number of daily newspapers available for every thousand people may be the most revealing. Such a measure is rough and crude (it includes young children, for example) but simple and indicative. It takes the total population and the number of newspapers produced each day and asks, "How many daily newspapers are available for every 1,000 people?" In 1976, in the depths of Mrs Gandhi's "emergency" and after years of newsprint shortages and advertising gloom, the Registrar of Newspapers recorded 9.3 million newspapers produced each day in India, for a total population estimated at 617 million – fifteen dailies for every 1,000 people. By 1996, the rate had nearly trebled – to forty-three dailies per 1,000 people. Evidence from other times and places suggests that once this rate reaches about thirty newspapers for 1,000 people, very substantial proportions of populations are affected.⁷⁹ Styles of politics and reactions to events begin to change, and popular involvement in geographically far-flung "national" political questions becomes possible.⁸⁰

Table 2.4. DAILY NEWSPAPERS PER 1,000 PEOPLE, 1951-96

	1951	1956	1961	1966	1971	1976	1981	1986	1991	1995	1996
Population (millions)	359	400	439	493	548	617	683	754	846	915	932
Daily circulation (millions)	2.5	2.9	5.3	6.8	9.0	9.3	15.2	21.5	24.3	35.5	40.2
Dailies (millions)	7	7	12	14	16	15	22	29	28	39	43

Sources: SOI, PAYB, PII for relevant years. Populations for 1956, 1966, 1976 calculated from SOI, 1986-7, p. 39. Report ... *Small Newspapers*, p. 136, for dailies in 1956 and 1961. Press Commission 1954, vol. 1, p. 15, figure for early 1950s for dailies in 1951, which Report ... *Fact Finding*, p. 21, uses similarly.

⁷⁸ PII, 1977, pp. 34-5. PII, 1996, p. 34.

⁷⁹ "Readership" is different from "sales". Indian-language newspapers are often held to have an average of at least five readers a copy. Report...*Fact-Finding*, p. 55. Another survey asserted that "a copy of a South India language daily is read by as many as 10 to 12 persons". Vidura, February 1980. A village survey in Andhra Pradesh in the 1960s found seven readers for every daily. Y. V. Lakshmana Rao, *Communication and Development: a Study of Two Indian Villages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), pp. 30-1.

⁸⁰ In urban, industrial societies, daily newspaper consumption is higher. In the 1960s, Sweden was believed to lead the world with 501 dailies per 1,000 people. Britain was calculated at 488; the USA 312; Japan 465; Australia 370. Bagdikian, *Information Machine*, pp. 48, 71. Turner, *Shocking History of Advertising*, p. 101.

The number of daily newspapers increased by five times between 1976 and 1996. In 1976, the Registrar of Newspapers for India had records of 875; in 1995, 4,453.⁸¹ The Registrar's figures of course are notorious⁸² and include the smallest and most fly-by-night of operations, but the very fact that running a newspaper seemed worth the trouble of engaging with the Registrar's bureaucracy in New Delhi was itself noteworthy. And in Mumbai, the Audit Bureau of Circulations, to which the major capitalist newspapers belonged, registered striking increases – from 225 publisher members in 1976 to 333 in 1992 (50 per cent) and from ninety-seven advertising-agency members to 215 (120 per cent).⁸³

These clues to what propels the newspaper revolution point to politics and capitalism. Newspapers did not expand simply because the technology was available to make Indian scripts live as they had not been able to live before. Nor did newspapers grow simply because more people knew how to read and write. They grew because entrepreneurs detected a growing hunger for information among ever-widening sections of India's people, who were potential consumers as well as newspaper readers. A race began to reach this audience. Advertising revenues were the prizes, and these would come largely to newspapers that could convince advertisers that they had more readers than their rivals. Win the readers and advertisements were your reward. Readers, meanwhile, were saying implicitly: "We will read newspapers that tell us about ourselves and reflect our concerns".

Look again at Figure 2.1. In 1979 Hindi, the national language, spoken by more than 40 per cent of India's people, for the first time passed English (spoken by no more than 3 per cent of Indians) in daily newspaper circulations. It became increasingly plausible to claim that people who did not know English could also spend and consume. The incentive to bring them newspapers grew.

In the 1950s, *Mathrubhumi* in Calicut had run its own type foundry and sold Malayalam types to small printers throughout Kerala. But by the late 1980s it had sold its rotary presses for scrap and closed its type foundry. It introduced offset printing when it opened its edition in the state capital, Trivandrum, in 1980. It began to introduce computer typesetting and retrain staff in 1983. According to M. P. Veerendrakumar,

⁸¹ *PII*, 1977, pp. 7, 35. *PII*, 1997, pp. 6-7.

⁸² The office of the Registrar is discussed in Robin Jeffrey, "Monitoring Newspapers and Understanding the State: India, 1948-93", *Asian Survey*, vol. 34, no. 9 (September 1994), pp. 748-63. The Registrar's figures, however, indicate trends and are useful, I believe, if used warily.

⁸³ "Audit Bureau of Circulations Limited, Mumbai. Statement showing circulations certified by the Bureau", photocopied typescript, given to me during an interview with C.S. Karnik, Secretary, ABC, Bombay, 29 April 1993.

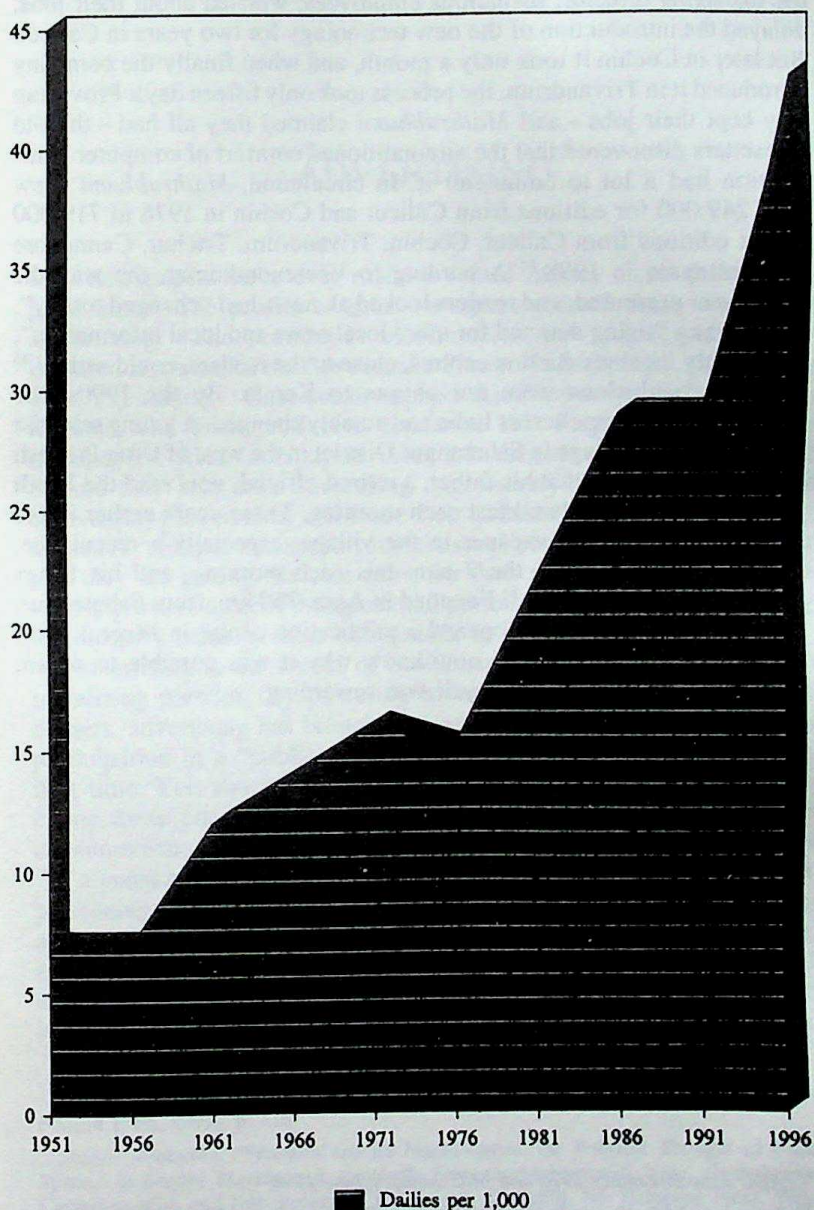


Figure 2.2.

DAILY NEWSPAPERS PER THOUSAND PEOPLE, INDIA 1951-96

the managing director, suspicious employees, worried about their jobs, delayed the introduction of the new technology for two years in Calicut. But later in Cochin it took only a month, and when finally the company introduced it in Trivandrum, the process took only fifteen days. Providing they kept their jobs – and *Mathrubhumi* claimed they all had – the old typesetters discovered that the airconditioned comfort of computer composition had a lot to commend it. In circulation, *Mathrubhumi* grew from 249,000 for editions from Calicut and Cochin in 1976 to 719,000 for six editions from Calicut, Cochin, Trivandrum, Trichur, Cannanore and Kottayam in 1998.⁸⁴ According to Veerendrakumar, the way the newspaper presented, and readers looked at, news had “changed totally”. There was a “rising demand for more local news and local information”, which only local production centres, close to the readers, could satisfy.⁸⁵

Such conclusions were not unique to Kerala. By the 1990s, the newspaper landscape across India had notably changed. A young scientist returning to his village in Saharanpur District in the west of Uttar Pradesh noted with surprise that his father, a retired official, now read the Hindi daily *Amar Ujala* at breakfast each morning. Three years earlier it had been rare to see a newspaper in the village, especially a recent one. Now papers arrived on the 7 a.m. bus each morning, and his father had one in his hands by 8.⁸⁶ Founded in Agra, 350 km. from Saharanpur, in 1948, *Amar Ujala* had opened a publication centre in Meerut, only 90 km. away, in 1989. We now know why it was possible to do so; the next chapter explains why it was rewarding.

⁸⁴ *ABC June-December 1976 and ABC January-June 1998.*

⁸⁵ Interview, M.P. Veerendrakumar, Managing Director, *Mathrubhumi*, Calicut, 2 April 1993.

⁸⁶ Conversation with a fellow passenger, Dakshin Express, Delhi to Hyderabad, 22 February 1993.

3

ADVERTISING

Few newspapers have ever made a lot of money from their selling price alone. The profits of great newspapers come from the sale of advertising. "The economics of American newspaper publishing", declared an owner of the *Los Angeles Times*, "is based on ... advertising, not ... circulation."¹ Once one newspaper discovers the joys of advertising revenue, and once producers determine that they must advertise in newspapers, rival newspapers must ask themselves how to respond. Should they also seek advertising aggressively? If they do not, their advertising-packed rival will erode their circulation by producing a more attractive, cheaper newspaper. Advertisers in turn have to be convinced that they are getting the best value for their money – that they are advertising where most of their potential customers are likely to be looking. Newspapers must increase circulations to win support.

Advertising is the herald of capitalism. In India it has presented a tantalizing paradox. By powering newspapers into ever more remote corners, advertising has brought the possibility of political activity – of participation in a "public sphere" – to vast numbers of people for the first time. Yet, simultaneously, advertising and capitalism may emasculate these possibilities by making newspapers into accomplices of consumerism. "The value of a citizen" becomes, one critic declares, "as a consumer or entrepreneur ..."² Thus in India, people may be experiencing in single lifetimes "the intoxicating excitement ... of being able to say what [they think]" for the first time – and perhaps being able to influence the conditions in which they live.³ Yet almost simultaneously pressures build up that would transform them into the deadened, ineffectual mass audience deplored by writers like Habermas. Such an

¹ Otis Chandler, quoted in Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly*, 4th edn (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), p. 116.

² Shalini Venturelli, "Freedom and Its Mystification: the Political Thought of Public Space," in Sandra Braman and Annabella Sreberny-Mohammadi (eds), *Globalization, Communication and Transnational Civil Society* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1996), p. 114.

³ Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975; first published 1972), p. 363.

analysis raises the prospect of moving from peasant to couch-potato in a single generation.

Up till the late 1970s major advertisers in India believed that they best reached potential customers almost exclusively through English-language newspapers. From the late 1970s this perception changed, partly as a result of advertisers' own research, but also through the concerted efforts of some Indian-language newspapers to prove that their readers were actual – or potential – consumers. This process – of seeking advertisers, demonstrating the wealth of readers and striving to increase circulation – drove the newspaper expansion of the 1980s and 1990s.

Two events twelve years apart provide landmarks. In 1978-9, surveys showed Indian-language publications surpassing English-language rivals both in circulation and in the “quality” – the spending potential – of their readers. India's second urban National Readership Survey (NRS-II) in 1978 highlighted burgeoning readership in small towns reached by few English publications. In the following year, the circulation of Hindi daily newspapers exceeded those of English for the first time, as Figure 2.1 shows. Thereafter, the gap steadily increased. By 1996 more than three times as many Hindi newspapers as English were sold each day,⁴ and aggressive Indian-language newspapers used such results to badger advertisers and advertising agencies. “Advertise in the Indian languages,” they said in effect. “We have the readers, and our readers – contrary to what you have believed up to now – have money to spend.”

They slowly succeeded in persuading buyers of advertising that to depend on English alone would be to miss vast numbers of new consumers. In 1991 the manufacturers of Horlicks, the milk-drink powder, mounted an expensive campaign with different visuals and text written specifically for Hindi, Bengali, Assamese, Oriya, Malayalam and Tamil.⁵ Devised by Hindustan Thompson, the Indian arm of the international advertising group of J. Walter Thompson, the polished series recognized that it was worth the expense of tailoring advertising to individual languages and their cultures. The overall theme of the Horlicks series remained the same in each language: home, family, security and well-being equated with Horlicks. In the Oriya version, children played chess; in the Malayalam version, a child, held securely by his father, played on a coconut palm; in Bengali, the child wrote letters on a slate to the delight of his parents; in Hindi, a naval officer, watched by a doting

⁴ *PIL*, 1997, p. 30 – 16.1 million Hindi dailies to 5 million English dailies.

⁵ Interview, Ambika Srivastava, Associate Vice-President and Media Services Director, Hindustan Thompson Associates Ltd, New Delhi, 19 May 1993. See also *A&M*, 28 February 1995, pp. 35, 60, for discussion of regional preferences in soaps and cars and for discussion of the Bournvita advertising campaign which also sought new markets in small towns.

wife, held his baby. The campaign was not the first to use words and pictures designed specifically for individual Indian languages. Horlicks had pioneered such techniques in the 1940s.⁶ But where earlier attempts were seen as exotic experiments, the 1991 series showed the way in which Indian advertising had to move if companies were to reach growing numbers of people with money to spend. With the Horlicks campaign in 1991 – the first year of India's "economic liberalization" – major international brands and their advertising agencies recognized that Indian-languages had become indispensable for consumer capitalism.

In the 1980s and 1990s, expenditure on advertising in all media increased stupendously. Between 1981 and 1989, it rose by five times. It quintupled again between 1990 and 1996.⁷ In crude rupee terms, major advertising agencies spent something like Rs 320 crores for their clients in 1981 (roughly US \$300 million in 1981) and Rs 4,200 crores in 1996 (roughly US \$1.2 billion in 1996) (see Figures 2.1. and 2.2). In 1996, in spite of thirteen years of television competition, print still got about 60 per cent of the total.⁸

More important for our purposes, from the mid-1980s, as much as half of the money spent on advertising in print may have flowed into Indian-language publications. Thus not only did the advertising cake grow by something like thirteen times, but Indian-language publications were able to secure bigger slices of that bigger cake.

"The most common name"

When advertising cake appears regularly on a country's dining table, profound changes are going on in the economic kitchen. The oldest surviving Indian-language newspaper, the Gujarati *Mumbai Samachar*, was founded in 1822 for the practical commercial reasons that have spawned newspapers all over the world.⁹ Yet advertising often made Indian-language newspaper proprietors uncomfortable. Clearly connected with capitalism, advertising in the twentieth century could be portrayed as "un-Indian" and "anti-national". It indicated social and

⁶ Vikram Doctor and Anvar Alikhan, "Kyon Na Aazmayen? A Brief History of Indian Advertising", *India Magazine*, vol. 17 (December 1996), p. 53.

⁷ The figures on advertising expenditure are bound to vary, depending on what categories are included. These estimates are based on the capitalized billings of more than 100 major agencies. Helen Anchan, "Advertising Scene: 1965-90" in *PAYB, 1989-90*, p. 77a and annual surveys of advertising in *A&M*, December issues, 1993-7.

⁸ *A&M*, 16-31 July 1997, p. 56, estimated total advertising revenues at Rs 4,727 crores, of which about 59 per cent went to print and 33 per cent to television.

⁹ *Midday*, 1 July 1992 (Eenadu Library). J. Natarajan, *History of Indian Journalism*, pp. 6, 58-9. *BI*, 14-27 July 1997, p. 121.

economic change that many people wished either to prevent or harness; advertising and capitalism, on the other hand, seek unbridled freedom.

From the beginnings of newspapers in English, capitalism and advertising were inseparable, and newspapers seemed to enjoy a double advantage from this relationship. A London pamphleteer in 1728 marvelled at the fact that coffee-house owners would pay for newspapers for their clients to read, yet the same newspapers were "ordinarily half full" of advertisements which yielded further income to their proprietors. Running a newspaper was like having "a good dinner every day and be[ing] paid for eating it. ... Never was there so fortunate a business."¹⁰ From the first a free press, held to be fundamental to liberal democracy, flourished on advertising.

For newspapers in India, however, the early nexus with advertising was not so close. "The place of advertising in newspaper finances was only recognized towards the 1880s,"¹¹ according to one account, and the newspapers that gained advertising were in English, intended primarily for the European rulers. India's first advertising agency, Dattaram of Bombay, was set up about 1905, not by eager advertisers but by canny Indian newspaper interests, keen to wean advertising from English-owned publications or to drum up advertisers of their own. The First World War led governments to try to manage information, and after the war a number of advertising agencies were established, including the first international agency, a branch of J. Walter Thompson (today's Hindustan Thompson) in Bombay in 1926.¹²

India's two most famous nationalist leaders, and the points of view they represented, both despised advertising. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), an outstanding journalist in English and Gujarati, had a vision of an Indian tradition revived, cleansed and free. Advertising had no place. Gandhi's newspapers, dedicated to the cause of Indian freedom and deeply suspicious of Western materialism, set standards that other Indian publicists often felt the need to emulate. Gandhi's weeklies did not accept advertisements, "ninety-nine per cent" of which he deemed "totally useless. ... If there were no system of advertisements, we are surely to save at least half the price [of any article]."¹³ He declared that "the sole aim of journalism should be service."¹⁴

¹⁰ Quoted in E.S. Turner, *The Shocking History of Advertising* (New York: Ballantine, 1953), p. 26.

¹¹ J. Natarajan, *History of Indian Journalism. Part II of the Report of the Press Commission* (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1955), p. 122.

¹² Doctor and Alikhan, "Kyon Na Aazmayen?", pp. 49-50.

¹³ *Young India*, 24 September 1919, in CWMG, vol. 16, p. 133.

¹⁴ M.K. Gandhi, *Autobiography* (1959), p. 211. I am grateful to Tom Weber for giving me these references.

Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964), India's prime minister in 1947-64, was as sceptical of advertising as Gandhi, though for slightly different reasons. Nehru's vision was of a modernized, industrialised, socialist India, to which advertising, and its capitalist parent, seemed an obstacle. "Advertising", he once told the Indian Society of Advertisers, "is essentially a thing to induce consumption, to make people buy things they do not want."¹⁵ Suspicious of capitalists, Nehru, and those who embraced his vision, regarded big newspapers as potential manipulators of people and events. Advertisers could be still worse: they could "manipulate the manipulators". Government-controlled radio was closed to all advertisements until 1967, and television, confined to three or four cities until the 1980s, showed commercials only from 1976.¹⁶

In the "socialist India" of the 1950s to 1970s, some proprietors and editors saw advertising as a gift of government, bestowed upon the newspaper industry's deserving poor. Such a view accorded with the rhetoric about building a self-sufficient India that would both industrialize and transform the lives of the rural poor. Somehow, too, advertising that came from government, as if by right, escaped the taint of having been solicited by salespersons. Instead, such advertising could be seen to have been graciously accepted by patriots. Proprietors of small newspapers – "small" is usually a synonym for Indian-language newspapers – regularly appealed to central and state governments for more advertising. One proprietor in 1971 told government to do more: it "should make all advertisers ... allot 25% of their advertisement budget to small and medium newspapers by legislation".¹⁷ Governments in the 1970s placed roughly that proportion of their advertising expenditure with small newspapers. By the standards of the time, it was a substantial sum: government advertising in the 1970s was estimated to account for 20 to 30 per cent of India's print advertising expenditure.¹⁸ Nearly half of this, however, was believed to go to the English-language press.¹⁹ "Though it is the declared policy of the Government of India and public undertakings to patronise small and medium newspapers", one paper

¹⁵ Quoted in Vikram Doctor and Anvar Alikhan, "Kyon Na Azmayen? A Brief History of Indian Advertising [part 2]", *Indian Magazine*, vol. XVIII (January 1997), p. 51.

¹⁶ Doctor and Alikhan, "Kyon Na Azmayen?", p. 51. Anchan, "Advertising Scene", pp. 75a-76a.

¹⁷ *Problems of Small Newspapers: an Analytical Study* (New Delhi: All-India Newspaper Editors' Conference, [1972]), p. 25.

¹⁸ *Problems*, p. 49. *Report of the Second Press Commission*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Controller of Publications, 1982), p. 96. N. Bhaskara Rao, "The Newspapers Scene, 1998: Miles to Go...", *Vidura*, January-March 1999, p. 36. Bhaskara Rao estimated that government advertising accounted for "at least one-sixth" of newspapers' revenue in the 1970s but had fallen to "hardly five per cent" by the late 1990s.

¹⁹ *Report...Fact-Finding*, p. 132.

told an inquiry, "yet it is only an eye-wash".²⁰ Even "socialist" governments wanted to spend most of their advertising budgets on the publications that, they were told, had the most readers.

Government efforts to use advertising to keep newspapers under restraint were common from the 1920s. As the national movement grew, British governments tried to manage the press by carefully increasing "the flow [of advertising] to selective Indian papers". A steady stream of government advertisements could keep a paper comfortably solvent – so long as it did not offend the government excessively. After independence, the advertising boot was on the other political foot: the British-owned *Statesman* of Calcutta was said to have lost Rs 800,000 a year in advertising when Indian governments came to power.²¹ The use of advertising to punish, reward and thereby seek to influence newspapers became part of the repertoire of political parties in government.

At the time of independence, an ambivalence about advertising remained. Government advertising seemed tainted, because of its association with British attempts to control the press. But commercial advertising seemed tainted too. Newspapers may have accepted it, but they did so apologetically. The chairman of the first Press Council captured the sense of national service that imbued this ideal when he wrote of students during the nationalist movement in 1921 gathering at a local press to take the paper, "even with the ink wet", to sell in the streets "and remit the proceeds to the accountant".

Gifts in kind [he continued] like rice and clothes used to be received in the press to be distributed among the staff who were not thinking of their wages and other material benefits but of their contribution to the national struggle.²²

In 1965, an inquiry into small newspapers found six proprietors who ran their publications at a loss "as a missionary work".²³ Similar attitudes, especially about the slightly disreputable nature of advertising, were still evident as late as 1999. "We don't sell [ads]. On the contrary, advertisers comes to us", said the proprietor of a remarkable small-town Gujarati daily. His words repeated those of the proprietor of an Urdu daily in Hyderabad six years earlier: we don't go out looking for advertisements. If people wish to place an advertisement, he said, they come to our advertising section and we accept it.²⁴ (In 1993, however, rivals

²⁰ *Problems*, p. 17.

²¹ Israel, *Communications*, p. 198.

²² Rajagopala Ayyangar in D.R. Mankekar (ed.), *What Ails the Indian Press?* (New Delhi: Somaiya Publications, 1970), p. 3.

²³ *Report...Small Newspaper*, pp. 22-3.

²⁴ Interview, Zahid Ali Khan, Proprietor and Editor, *Siasat*, Hyderabad, 23 February 1993. As late as 1999, Pratap Shah, managing editor and proprietor of *Saurashtra Samachar*

were ready to mock such gentility and speculate that Saudi Arabian donations made it possible).²⁵

Advertising under capitalism is a three-handed game. At one corner are the people who produce newspapers and other media. In India in the 1970s, many of them, particularly in the Indian-language press, were disdainful of capitalist advertising, unsure about how urgently they needed it and uncertain about how to go about getting it. At the second corner were the people with things to advertise – manufacturers of products and sellers of services. In India in the 1970s, they did not have to advertise a great deal: "Indian advertisers ... cut out advt [*sic*] expenditure first if any economy is to be effected".²⁶ Demand for most things exceeded supply, and "everyone knew" that anyone with significant purchasing power read English. At the third corner were advertising agencies. Long ago, advertising agents had originated as touts hired by canny newspaper owners to drum up advertising. Becoming independent of newspapers, the agencies acted as go-betweens. They analyzed a seller's product, advised about the most effective places to put ads and created the pictures and the words of an advertisement. In India in the 1970s, advertising agents were suspect – manipulators of the manipulators, to paraphrase Nehru.

In 1974, on the eve of Mrs Gandhi's "emergency", advertising practitioners declared that a "depression in the advertising industry" had begun.²⁷ Within ten years, however, the volume of work – and the profits – of advertising agencies skyrocketed. At the same time, Indian-language newspapers ceased being languid enterprises aiming to serve the nation and perhaps enhance the proprietor's influence. Many became unashamedly capitalist undertakings striving for profit – profit that came from the exploding advertising industry. The need for profit drove the need for ads which in turn drove newspapers to expand and prove their circulations.

"The main event"

"It's boom time, folks!", *Business India* told readers of a cover story on the Indian advertising industry in 1993-4. "Awesome", concluded the industry journal *A&M* to describe the growth of the industry in the

said: "Advertisers come to us". Interview, Pratap Shah, Bhavnagar, 3 February 1999.

²⁵ Interview, Shahid Siddiqui, Editor and Managing Director, *Nai Duniya*, New Delhi, 10 May 1993.

²⁶ M. R. Surjan to Nandini Satpathy, Minister of Information and Broadcasting, 21 December 1971, in *Problems*, p. 89.

²⁷ Helen Anchan, "Advertising Scene: 1965-90," *PAYB*, 1989-90 (New Delhi: INFA, 1990), p. 75a.

1994-5 financial year.²⁸ The figures for measuring the value of the advertising are slippery, as the notes to Table 3.1 show. But even using the most sceptical and cautious measures, India's advertising industry appears to have grown by an average of 30 per cent a year through the 1990s and to have been worth at least US \$1 billion a year by the middle of the decade. The table traces the annual rate of growth from year to year of the top 100 to 150 agencies which participated in A&M's annual survey.

Table 3.1. ADVERTISING INDUSTRY: CAPITALIZED BILLINGS OF AGENCIES PARTICIPATING IN A&M ANNUAL SURVEYS, 1990-8

(1)	(2) <i>No. of agencies participating</i>	(3) <i>Capitalized billings (crores of rupees)</i>	(4) <i>Annual growth of participating agencies (%)</i>
1990-1	<i>n.a.</i>	930.9	17.1
1991-2	<i>n.a.</i>	1,161.5	25.2
1992-3	111	1,585.6	36.5
1993-4	131	2,220.1	37.4
1994-5	149	3,501.3	49.5
1995-6	143	4,218.6	30.4
1996-7	120	3,905.8 [†]	22.4
1997-8	131	5,331.0	17.9

Sources: A&M, December 1993, 15 December 1994, 31 December 1995, 31 December 1996, 16-31 December 1997, 31 December 1998. A&M was a monthly in 1993.

*"Capitalized billings" include the amount the agencies spend on buying media space and time, the cost of producing the advertisement and the agencies' commission (reckoned at 15 per cent). By far the largest portion is spent on purchase of space and time from media outlets.

†The fall in capitalized billings in 1996-7 results from 23 fewer agencies participating in the A&M survey. Though this reluctance to participate indicates a weaker year, the overall expenditure on advertising did not decline, as a cursory look at Column 3 for 1995-6 and 1996-7 might suggest. Even 1997-8, which the advertising industry regarded as a dreadful year, showed growth.

The industry's "capitalized billings" – the value of all the advertising placed by major agencies, plus the agencies' commission charges – were estimated to have increased by 37 per cent in 1993-4 and to be growing in recent years at an average of 36 per cent a year.²⁹ If you were in advertising, the story got better. The figure grew by 50 per cent in 1994-5, 30 per cent in 1995-6 and a "mere" 22 per cent in 1996-7. By the mid-1990s, the "capitalized billings" of the leading

²⁸ *BI*, 30 January-12 February 1995, p. 54. A&M, 31 December 1995, p. 36.

²⁹ *BI*, 30 January-12 February 1995, p. 54. A&M, 15 December 1994, pp. 35-43.

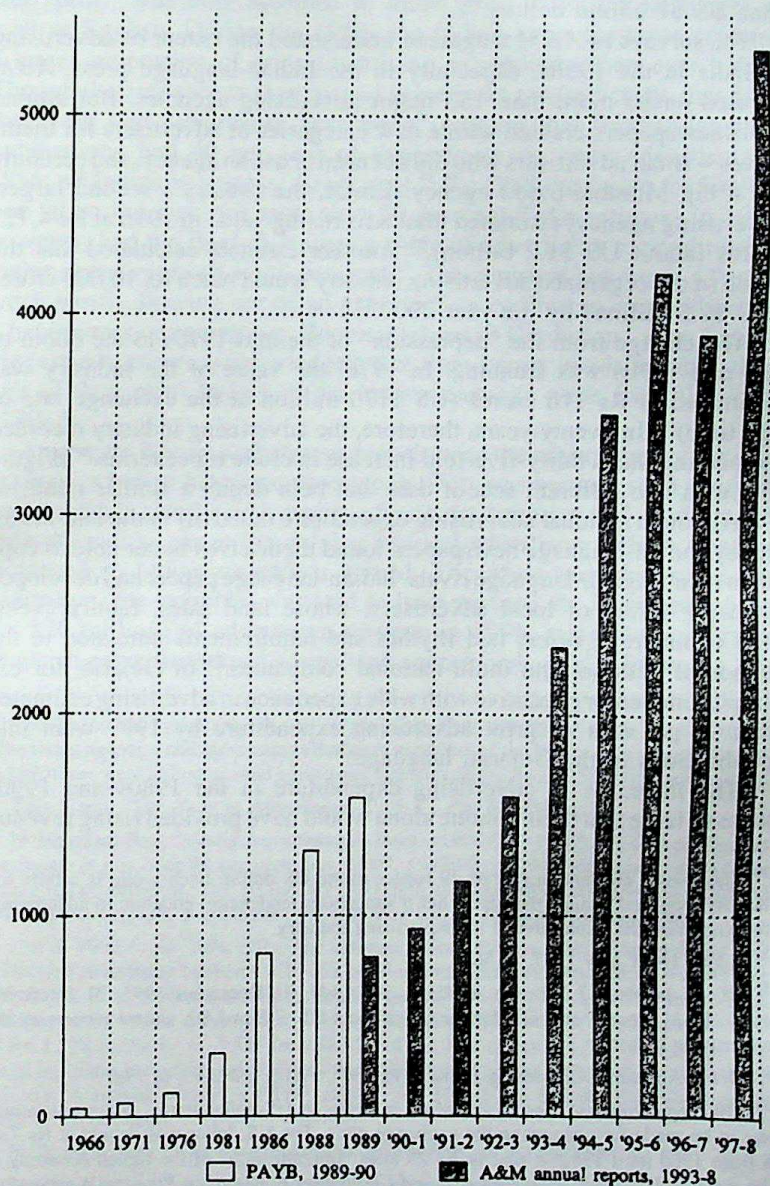
Crores of
Rupees

Figure 3.1.
ADVERTISING EXPENDITURE, 1966-98

advertising agencies totalled about Rs 4,000 crores a year, or more than US \$1 billion dollars.³⁰

The surveys of *A&M* magazine understated the extent of advertising in India in the 1990s, especially in the Indian-language press. *A&M* focused on no more than 150 major advertising agencies. But around India newspapers created whole new categories of advertisers for themselves – small advertisers who did not need or use an agency, and certainly not a big Mumbai-based agency. Lintas, the country's second largest advertising agency, estimated total advertising value in 1996 at Rs 4,727 crores (about US \$1.2 billion).³¹ Another estimate calculated that the value of the organized advertising industry would reach Rs 10,000 crores (US \$2.5 billion) by the year 2000.³²

The change from the "depression" of the mid-1970s to the boom of the mid-1990s was stunning. In 1976, the value of the industry was estimated at Rs 116 crores (US \$170 million at the exchange rate of the time).³³ In twenty years, therefore, the advertising industry recorded something like a thirty-five-fold increase in crude rupee terms.³⁴ (Figure 3.1 uses two different sets of data, but both depict a similar trend.)

Although national advertising expenditure tailed off in the late 1990s, many Indian-language newspapers found themselves better able to cope than their English-language rivals. Indian-language papers had developed growing forces of local advertisers, whose land sales, family events and commercial offers had rhythm and requirements unrelated to the trends of national and multi-national companies.³⁵ In Gujarat, for example, one senior executive with wide experience in advertising estimated that 90 per cent of print advertising expenditure by 1999 went into publications in the Gujarati language.³⁶

The increases in advertising expenditure in the 1980s and 1990s were so large that their volume alone would have provided rising revenue

³⁰ This uses a conversion rate of 40 rupees to the US dollar. Such a rate is a little too heavily weighted against the rupee, but it suppresses tendencies, endemic to advertising, to exaggerate the expansion of the advertising industry.

³¹ *A&M*, 16-31 July 1997, p. 56.

³² *BI*, 30 January-12 February 1995, p. 54. *A&M*, 31 December 1995, 31 December 1996, 16-31 December 1997, for the magazine's 6th, 7th and 8th annual reports on the advertising industry.

³³ Helen Anchan, "Advertising Scene: 1965-90", *PAYB*, 1989-90, p. 77a.

³⁴ This represented at least a sevenfold increase in US-dollar terms, where allowance has to be made for changes in the exchange rates. The US dollar was valued at Rs 7 or 8 from 1966 until 1982. It rose to Rs 25 after "liberalization" of the Indian economy in the early 1990s. *India: Achievements and Challenges in Reducing Poverty* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1997), p. viii.

³⁵ Interview, K. Kumaran, Managing Director, *Dinakaran*, Chennai, 18 January 1999.

³⁶ Interview, P.G. Joshi, Chief Executive, *Sandesh*, Ahmedabad, 2 February 1999.

to Indian-language publications able to attract the attention of advertisers. But "print" was now accepted to mean print in Indian languages as well as English. During the 1980s the Indian-language press captured a larger proportion of print advertising expenditure than ever before. Though the evidence is sketchy and sometimes contradictory, data from the *Press and Advertisers Year Book*³⁷ suggest that English-language publications had 60 per cent of expenditure on print advertising in 1986; all Indian languages, 40 per cent.³⁸ By 1988 the figure for English had fallen but was still more than 50 per cent.³⁹ An estimate in 1990, however, had the English-language share of advertising expenditure by major agencies down to 46 per cent.⁴⁰ The statistics are weak – "guess work mostly flowing out of ad agencies", according to one authority⁴¹ – but impressions are strong. Representatives of Hindustan Lever, India's biggest advertiser, acknowledged that they began to place more than half of their print budget in the Indian-language press from the mid-1980s.⁴²

Aggregate figures probably underestimated the advertising going into aggressive Indian-language newspapers. This was because such national surveys dealt chiefly with major advertising agencies and could make little attempt to gauge the volume of local advertising, which steadily increased as Indian capitalism spread. The *Malayala Manorama* organization, for example, was said to have secured Rs 79 crores (about US \$20 million) of advertising revenue in 1996, a sizable proportion of which came from local advertising aggressively sold.⁴³ From the late

³⁷ Though not as systematic as one might wish, they are drawn from the returns of advertising agencies and publications that were members of the Indian Newspaper Society. In 1990 there were 562 accredited advertising agencies dealing with 258 major publications.

³⁸ Tara Sinha, "The Year in Advertising: 1986-8", *PAYB* 1987, p. 78a.

³⁹ N. Bhaskara Rao, "Media Advertising in India – 1990-91," *PAYB*, 1990-1, p. 83a, has the figure at just over 50 per cent; but *PAYB*, 1989-90, pp. 94a-96a, has it at 56.6 per cent, a fall nevertheless. *Tol*, 30 January 1991, p. 5, cites an ORG survey which estimated that English-language publications got just over half of India's advertisements.

⁴⁰ *PAYB*, 1990-1, pp. 109a-110a. The estimate calculated the advertising spend of 562 accredited advertising agencies with 258 publications. The total expenditure was Rs 491 crores (US \$140 million), of which English got Rs 226 crores (US \$65 million). This estimate of Rs 491 is very modest when set beside a different *PAYB* estimate for 1989 of Rs 1,578 crores or of *A&M* for 1989-90 of Rs 795 crores. *PAYB*, 1989-90, p. 77a, based on Lintas estimates. *A&M*, December 1993, fourth annual survey of the advertising industry. A similar survey in *PAYB*, 1996-7, pp. 100a-101a, had the English-language share at 70 per cent.

⁴¹ N. Bhaskar Rao, "The Advertising Scene: 1987-88" in *PAYB*, 1988, p. 75a.

⁴² Interview, Irfan Khan, General Manager, Corporate Communications, Hindustan Lever, Bombay, 27 April 1993.

⁴³ *A&M*, 16-31 July 1997, p. 58. *Malayala Manorama* had one English-language publication, *The Week*, and the English-language *Manorama Yearbook*.

1980s it appears that something like half of print expenditure was going into the Indian-language press. Thus in 1993-4 the equivalent of roughly US \$200 million would have been spent on advertising in Indian-language publications.⁴⁴

What does this mean when set next to the vastness of India and its daily newspapers? If we accept the inflated government figure of 4,000 daily newspapers in the mid-1990s,⁴⁵ an equal division of US \$200 million would have given each \$50,000, a huge sum for many tiny, cottage-industry operations. If the amount were divided only among the twenty-five biggest publishers of Indian-language newspapers, each would get something like \$2.5 million, a sum worth fighting over. This figure, we must remember, excluded local advertisements, both classified and display. In short, large sums of money were available to those Indian-language publications that could satisfy advertisers and their agents.

Various media competed for these vast increases. Government-run colour television, showing commercials, began in 1982. Satellite television, disseminated by small cable operators, started in 1991 and provided another competitor.⁴⁶ The English-language press continued to proclaim itself as the medium that reached people with genuine purchasing power. However, once television arrived, the share of newspapers and magazines – “print” – in total advertising expenditure dropped steadily – from an estimated 75 per cent in 1985 to about 60 per cent in 1997.⁴⁷ Yet the increases in advertising expenditure in the 1980s and 1990s were so large by previous standards that the revenues for Indian-language publications grew significantly. Driven by the “liberalization” of the Indian economy and the arrival of multi-national corporations, advertising expanded “at a frenetic pace”, according to an industry magazine, “making it resemble the California gold rush”.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ N. Murali, General Manager of the *Hindu*, estimated total advertising expenditure in 1994 at Rs 3,500 crores or more than US \$1 billion, of which 63 per cent went to print media. Indian-language print had roughly half of this – perhaps US \$300 million. *BI*, 22 May-4 June 1995, p. 55. In 1996, another estimate had 55 per cent of print advertising going to English-language publications. *A&M*, 31 May 1996, p. 45. A conflicting estimate – unsourced and without a byline – in 1997 held that 75 per cent of print advertising still went into English-language publications. This runs counter to most other estimates and calculations I have made or seen. *A&M*, 16-31 July 1997, p. 58.

⁴⁵ *PII*, 1994, p. 8.

⁴⁶ Sivanti Ninan, *Through the Magic Window: Television and Change in India* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1995), pp. 139-53, 156-7, 167.

⁴⁷ N. Bhaskara Rao and G. N. S. Raghavan, *Social Effects of Mass Media in India* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1996), p. 74. Lintas estimated that 60 per cent of advertising expenditure went into print in 1996. *A&M*, 16-31 July 1997, p. 56. *A&M* itself is a mark of the growth of the advertising industry. “A&M” stands for “advertising and marketing”. The magazine was founded as a monthly in 1989 and went fortnightly in 1994.

⁴⁸ *A&M*, 15 December 1994, p. 35.

Before the 1980s, no figures are available that break down the division of print advertising by language. Proprietors of Indian-language publications believe, however, that they got only a small share. Impressionistic evidence supports them. The First Press Commission in 1954 concluded that English publications got the large share of advertising.⁴⁹ "The notion of conceiving ads in Indian languages", an advertising person wrote in 1972, "has not made much progress."⁵⁰ Advertising in Delhi in the old days, according to a Hindi editor, was distributed though deals worked out with the English-language press in the Gymkhana Club.⁵¹

Visionaries in the past had proclaimed the "enormous potential" of Indian-language newspapers as vehicles for advertising. Advertisers, the editor D.R. Mankekar told a meeting in 1969, think

the Indian language press does not have the pull. It is for you to prove that it has the pull. You must have readership surveys to prove what kind of commodity your reader buys.⁵²

But, as Indian-language proprietors told an earlier inquiry, "advertising is not popular ... with the readers in the district towns and rural areas."⁵³

Nor were advertising people particularly popular among old-style proprietors and editors. Until the 1980s, a hint of contempt occasionally coloured newspaper people's attitudes towards advertising agencies. When the Indian and Eastern Newspaper Society (IENS), the newspaper publishers' association, started a publication in 1974, it "needlessly and factlessly [*sic*] made snide attacks on advertising people."⁵⁴

Advertising people were similarly exasperated with editors and proprietors. "The majority of newspapers", an advertising man wrote, "had no promotional effort worth the name and were clinging to the old notion that advertising was a form of patronage."⁵⁵ Indeed, an idea persisted – perhaps the legacy of the nationalist movement and of economic planning – that advertisers had a patriotic duty to buy space in Indian-language newspapers and, if disinclined, should be made to.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Quoted in Navin Mathur, *Advertising and Consumer Reaction in India* (Jaipur: Printwell, 1986), p. 81.

⁵⁰ K. Kurian, "Year in Advertising, 1971-2", *PAYB*, 1973, p. 137a.

⁵¹ S. P. Singh in *Vidura*, June 1992, p. 7.

⁵² D. R. Mankekar (ed.), *What Ails the Indian Press?* (New Delhi: Somaiya, 1970), p. 79. See also T. N. M. Lingam, *Circulation Problems in Indian Newspapers* (New Delhi: Press Institute of India, n.d. [1964]), p. 25.

⁵³ *Report...Small Newspapers*, p. 182.

⁵⁴ K. Kurian, "The Year in Advertising, 1973-4", *PAYB*, 1975, p. 136a.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Report of the Second Press Commission*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Controller of Publications, Government of India, 1982), p. 122. Submission from the Indian Languages Newspaper

Indeed, the association of newspaper proprietors, the IENS, resisted the holding of the first National Readership Survey (NRS-I) in 1970. NRS-I nevertheless became the "stepping-stone for scientific Media Planning in the country"⁵⁷ and began the process that shifted advertisers' attention away from English and the cities towards Indian languages and the countryside. Neither the IENS, which had 250 publications as members, nor the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC), which audited newspaper circulations from 1948, helped conduct the survey. Established publications, it was said, feared that profitable, long-standing relationships between publishers and advertisers might be upset if new, apparently "scientific" data told different stories about who readers were and what they read.

NRS-I was financed by the other two sides of the advertising triangle – the Indian Society of Advertisers and the Advertising Agencies Association of India – and was carried out by the Operations Research Group, one of India's first successful market research organizations. Conducted only in towns and cities, NRS-I's sample of 57,000 indicated that 28.5 million urban Indians (in an urban population in 1971 of about 130 million) read a daily, weekly or monthly publication. It emphasized "the potential of the [Indian-] language press as against the limited reach of English publications and ... highlighted the larger readership of [Indian-] language newspapers compared with English [-language] newspapers".⁵⁸ People selling advertising now were able to pose the question: if Indian-language publications were popular in cities and towns, how much greater might readership be in small towns and the countryside? By creating the basis for such questions, NRS-I started processes that eventually provoked the rapid growth of the Indian-language press.

NRS-I did not, however, produce an immediate flood of advertising for Indian-language publications. Mrs Gandhi's Congress government was entering its pinkest "socialist" phase. "All the fears about 1973 came true", wrote an advertising man. "The advertising business declined. Gloom deepened in newspaper offices and advertising agencies." The year 1973-4, he concluded,

was a year of struggle. There was heart-burning, also much heart-searching. Mutual recriminations strained ... mature relationships. The general picture was that of blinded men lurching in darkness, unsure of each step.⁵⁹

Association (ILNA).

⁵⁷ Helen Anchan, "Advertising Scene: 1965-90". *PAYB*, 1989-90, p. 75a.

⁵⁸ K.E. Eapen and P.L. Vishweshwar Rao, "Communication Research: Trends and Priorities. The Press in India", in *National Seminar on Communication Research*, 1 Session. *Print Media* (New Delhi: Indian Institute of Mass Communications, 1984), p. 12.

⁵⁹ Kurian, "The Year in Advertising, 1973-4", pp. 133a, 138a.

Throughout the 1970s, Mrs Gandhi strove to control the press with "price-page schedules" (limiting the number of pages a newspaper could carry and prescribing the selling price), newsprint quotas and ultimately in June 1975 the censorship of the "emergency" itself.

The end of the "emergency" in 1977 united and unleashed three different phenomena. Curiosity, capitalism and technology blended to propel the advertising industry and the expansion of all forms of media, especially the Indian-language press. Immense curiosity about what had happened in the previous seventeen months led to increased circulations and allowed proprietors to increase advertising rates. Manufacturers and importers, now with growing opportunities to sell more products, sensed the existence of larger markets. And offset presses and personal computers, as we saw in Chapter 2, began to make the production of Indian-language newspapers faster and more effective. Advertisers looked for wider markets in smaller towns and the countryside; newspapers now had incentive to invest in the tools that would let them reach such audiences. And the size of the potential audience expanded slowly but steadily to encompass tens of millions of newly literate potential readers.

A second National Readership Survey (NRS-II) in 1978 provided ammunition that allowed a few Indian-language publications to mount aggressive campaigns to convince advertisers about the number and the purchasing power of their readers.⁶⁰ Limited to towns and cities, NRS-II estimated a two-thirds increase in readers since 1970 and hinted at a great untapped pool of readers and potential consumers in the countryside. The largest growth in readership had been in the so-called Class III Towns – country towns of 20-50,000 people. Overall, the survey estimated that 48 million urban men and women regularly saw a periodical of some kind.⁶¹

The results of NRS-II became a landmark for Indian capitalism. Commentators marvelled at "the fantastic growth of newspapers and periodicals in Indian languages," speculated about the vast potential of "rural markets", and estimated that the countryside held more than 160 million literate people.⁶² Widely repeated and accepted, such statements allowed marketing specialists, hired by a few Indian-language newspapers, to assail advertisers and advertising agencies. Their presentations drummed home a message: the capacity of Indian-language newspapers to reach untapped markets.

⁶⁰ For details, Robin Jeffrey, "Advertising and Indian-Language Newspapers: How Capitalism Supports (Certain) Cultures and (Some) States, 1947-96," *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 70, no. 1 (Spring 1997), p. 68.

⁶¹ *National Readership Survey 1978. Management and Summary*, pp. 1-3, 8, 10, 22.

⁶² *IT*, 1-15 December 1980, p. 115.

Table 3.2. PERCENTAGE OF URBAN POPULATION READING VARIOUS PUBLICATIONS, 1970 AND 1978 (%)

Kind	All people (NRS-I 1970)	All people (NRS-II 1978)	Men (NRS-II)	Women (NRS-II)
Any	37.2	52.8	66.2	37.5
Daily	31.6	37.3	50.9	21.8
Weekly	19.2	30.6	38.7	21.3
Fortn'tly	—	14.7	18.5	10.3

Source: NRS 1978. *Management Summary*, pp. 2, 8, 10, 22.

Recognizing that their business was rapidly changing, a few proprietors revamped their management structures and their approach to the sale of both advertisements and the newspaper itself. One of the most vivid examples was the Ananda Bazar Patrika group, based on the great Bengali daily newspaper of the same name.⁶³ When Shobha Subrahmanyam, later chief executive, joined the Ananda Bazar Patrika group in 1979 from an advertising agency, her first task was to persuade major advertisers that they should advertise in a Bengali-language daily. On the surface, it should have been easy: in 1980, *Ananda Bazar Patrika* was the highest-circulating single-edition daily in the country (425,000: *ABC June-December 1980*). But many advertisers and advertising agencies had to be convinced. In "those days there was no television", Subrahmanyam said.

It was basically the mainline English press and English magazines that managed to get the bulk of [advertising], the strength.

... There was a total and complete mental block about the language press, and that was irrespective of what the readership figures said ... People would just say, "This is a premium product. I am not going to advertise [it] in any language paper." So if it was suiting material or ... a television set or ... an airconditioner, there was just this mental block that it could only be advertised in the English press because anyone who reads a language paper is not affluent enough ... to afford it. And this is true [today] really to some extent in some parts of the country, but in those days they made no exception, it was across the board.

So the first task then was to try and tell them, "Look, there are certain pockets in India where the language press is very fine, reaches more affluent people than even the English press does." It was very difficult to get that message across. ... We just kept using the readership figures, we did a lot of presentations. We got the master tapes [of readership survey data], and we did a lot of cross-tabulations and things like that.

And what helped us was [that] the media planners in India are very figure conscious. It's a plus and a minus, sometimes it works against you, but in this case it helped because you were able to convince them only on the readership ... The

⁶³ Robin Jeffrey, "Bengali: 'Professional, Somewhat Conservative' and Calcuttan", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 25 January 1997, pp. 142-3.

media had not really used research [until then] so that's why we were able to make an impact: it was the first time that media was coming to the agencies and to advertisers and saying, "Look, this is the quality of our readership."

It took at least four to five years before we started getting...corporate campaigns...in a big way...A company going public or wanting to communicate something to the government and their shareholders – that kind of campaign was restricted largely to the English press.

But slowly... – and this again didn't happen throughout India – it happened only in places where the language press was strong – in Kerala, in Bengal, and Gujarat... – both advertisers and agency planners began to gather [understand] the strength of this medium.

The hold of English on advertisers loosened as advertisers realized, and Indian-language newspapers told them, that large numbers of readers and consumers lived in small towns and the countryside – and did not know English. "The side show [rural India] is becoming the main event", a previously sceptical market researcher admitted in 1995.⁶⁴

In Kerala, *Malayala Manorama*, the largest Malayalam daily, began to renovate, just as the Ananda Bazar chain had done.⁶⁵ The company hired management consultants in 1979 and restructured their organization in 1980. K. M. Mathew, the chief editor and patriarch of the proprietorial family, said that the decision stemmed from a realization that the paper had either to become fully professional or risk decline.⁶⁶ At *Sakal* in Pune, similar changes gained momentum after control of the paper was acquired in 1985 by the capitalist Pawar family. They turned it into a public limited company in 1989.⁶⁷ *Sakal* benefited from – and helped to create – the change in the perception of major advertisers about the value of the Indian-language press. *Sakal* congratulated itself in 1992 that

two years back we carried 60% local advertisements and 40% national advertisements. Today with [the volume of] local advertisements remaining the same, it is 30% local advertisements and 70% national advertisements...⁶⁸

P. G. Pawar, *Sakal's* managing director and a brother of Sharad Pawar, the politician, marketed the newspaper as if it were toothpaste or cooking

⁶⁴ Rama Bijapurkar of MARG in *A&M*, 31 January 1995, p. 32.

⁶⁵ Robin Jeffrey, "Malayalam: 'The Day-to-Day Social Life of the People...'", *Economics and Political Weekly*, 4-11 January 1997, pp. 20-1.

⁶⁶ Interviews, Rajen Mathew, Divisional Manager – Personnel, *Malayala Manorama*, Kottayam, 13 April 1994, and K. M. Mathew, Chief Editor, Kottayam, 7 and 13 April 1993. *Mangalam's* circulation was 882,000 in 1994 (ABC January-June 1994).

⁶⁷ Sharad Pawar, one member of the family, has been Chief Minister of Maharashtra and Defence Minister of the Government of India. Robin Jeffrey, "Marathi: Big Newspapers Are Elephants", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22 February 1997, p. 385.

⁶⁸ *SakaLinks*, January-June 1992, p. 4 (in-house magazine).

oil. "I sell my news and views to the reader," he said, "and I sell my readers to the advertisers." *Sakal's* annual turnover, as we saw, grew from Rs 60 million to Rs 300 million in the seven years to 1992.⁶⁹

To woo and win major national advertisers – and help create conditions in which the wooers (Indian-language newspapers) would become the wooed – was one way to increase revenues. Another was to create new advertisers. The goal was to convince people who had never advertised – perhaps never subscribed to a newspaper – that advertising was a good idea. An exemplar of this technique was *Eenadu*, the dominant Telugu daily.⁷⁰ Founded in the remote provincial town of Vishakapatam in 1974, *Eenadu* was the brainchild and protégé of Ramoji Rao, who drifted from student communist sympathies into advertising and took to it, he later said, "like a fish to water".⁷¹ When he returned from New Delhi to Andhra Pradesh in the early 1960s, he started successful chit funds, and by 1974 had the money and the sense of timing to start *Eenadu*. By 1998, Ramoji Rao ensured that *Eenadu* used the latest technology to publish from ten towns; it commanded close to 70 per cent of audited Telugu daily circulations.⁷²

In 1989, *Eenadu* set out to turn Telugus into advertisers. It took the newspaper deep into small-town and rural Andhra Pradesh by producing "district dailies" – tabloid inserts focusing on the news of a single district. If you lived, for example, in Kurnool District, your daily *Eenadu* contained not only the twelve-page broadsheet from the production centre in Anantapur, but also an eight-page tabloid devoted to Kurnool District. Aiming to generate local classified and display advertisements, the district dailies, claimed *Eenadu* executives, "created and educated a new breed of small advertisers". By 1993, more than 2,500 advertising sales people went door to door even in villages to sell the virtues of advertising. Close to 40 per cent of the 200,000 column centimetres of advertising each month in the district dailies were personal advertisements. The ultimate achievement was considered to be the example of a farmer in the Andhra delta who bought a full-page ad in his district daily at a cost of Rs 6,000 to lament "the death of a stud bull"⁷³ (see Illustration 3.6).

⁶⁹ Interview, P.G. Pawar, managing director, *Sakal*, 20 March 1993.

⁷⁰ Robin Jeffrey, "Telugu: Ingredients of Growth and Failure", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1 February 1997, pp. 192-5.

⁷¹ Interview, Ramoji Rao, Hyderabad, 26 February 1993.

⁷² *ABC*, January-June 1998. From 1996, *Eenadu* faced a convincing challenge from a new newspaper, *Vaaritha*, edited by an ex-*Eenadu* editor with no love lost for Ramoji Rao. *BI*, 8-21 April 1996, pp. 146-7. *Vaaritha* built a circulation of 213,000 by 1998, while other Telugu dailies dropped farther out of the race.

⁷³ Interview, Piush Bahl, Assistant Manager (Advertising), *Eenadu*, Hyderabad, 1 March 1993.

In 1992, *Eenadu* embarked on a major marketing campaign to convince Telugu-speakers of the advantages of marriage advertisements. Readers of English newspapers in India are familiar with the columns of classified marriage advertisements, particularly in Sunday editions. These have been common in Malayalam and Tamil, but not in Telugu. "We had absolutely zero matrimonial advertising," an *Eenadu* executive said. The newspaper deployed the techniques of international marketing. "We had a study done. We tried to find out why people in Andhra Pradesh shy away from matrimonial advertising".⁷⁴ MARG, one of India's top three market-research agencies, did the research, and the newspaper hired Everest, an advertising agency which had done the publicity for the launch of three new production centres started in the 1990s.

The campaign to promote marriage advertisements was, according to an Everest executive, the biggest challenge *Eenadu* had undertaken. "We were very worried [there were so many caste taboos and ways of celebrating marriage]; we had to study and understand marriage systems, caste systems."⁷⁵ Preparation of television advertisements involved discussion with sample groups and careful selection of the right young woman to use in the ads. The "right model" proved to be a Punjabi, not a Telugu. Eventually, a series of advertisements was used on television for three months. Computerized horoscopes were offered as an incentive to those who took out marriage advertisements. From the launch of the matrimonials page, *Eenadu* attracted more than 170 classified ads a week.

Similar elaborate research and marketing campaigns were used to create a women's supplement and a real estate section. "Again, we had absolutely nothing", the *Eenadu* executive said. "Zero real estate ads. Then we again started off an ad campaign and ... a real estate page. It's been an extremely good success – an entire new segment."⁷⁶

To create a public market for land in rural India marks a dramatic change in people's outlook. The gaining and losing of land has been a subject full of conflict for hundreds of years. But the gains and losses happened quietly, surreptitiously. They became widely known only if riots resulted, or administrators, believing social balances were being upset, established inquiries and wrote reports. Many land transactions, if we accept various accounts, typically happened between scheming moneylenders and cash-strapped peasants, or between clever village accountants and spendthrift high-status castes. In neither stereotype did the person disposing of land have the chance to put an ad in a newspaper. Whether such an option would necessarily improve the seller's prospects

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 25 February 1993.

⁷⁵ Interview, Vinod Nair, Everest Advertising Pvt Ltd, Hyderabad, 3 March 1993.

⁷⁶ Interview, Piush Bahl, Hyderabad, 25 February 1993.

may be questioned; but to advertise the sale of land – and have such advertisements spread over areas far beyond the control of local power-holders – signals the arrival of an essential aspect of capitalism, mobility. Like capital, newspapers also move – read in the teashop in the early morning, carried to work by lunchtime, recycled for packets of parched gram by the next day. But land, the centrepiece of a dissolving peasant-based economic system, stays put. *Eenadu*'s local real estate advertisements did not create capitalist relations in rural Andhra Pradesh; but they signalled that those relations were inescapable. The advertisements also explained every day how this capitalist system worked and thereby embedded ideas about its legitimacy and availability in the minds of tens of thousands of people. The two Bens, Anderson and Bagdikian, might have been writing about *Eenadu* and Andhra when one pointed out that advertising was central to early American newspapers, whose "most common name" was "advertiser", and the other, that print was "the first modern-style mass-produced industrial commodity".⁷⁷

Other Indian-language newspapers adopted the techniques employed at *Eenadu*, *Ananda Bazar Patrika* and *Sakal* and added promising local variations. Throughout India, state-run lotteries were popular. *Punjab Kesari*, the largest circulated Hindi daily, saw lottery results, along with classified advertisements, as a source of revenue. "Every state has got its own lottery," said Ashwini Kumar, a member of *Punjab Kesari*'s owning family and editor of the Delhi edition.

We offer[ed] them [the lottery authorities] a special rate and we developed this lottery business. Now we are charging them the original rate [i.e., our standard rate] and ... they are giving us the ads ... It's only in the Hindi newspapers we have developed the lottery business. No English paper has developed it. Secondly, we have also in Hindi – only two [Hindi] papers in this country have [done it] – developed the classified columns ... It has been very good.⁷⁸

Elsewhere, some newspaper executives disapproved of lottery advertisements. *Sakal*, for example, prided itself on *not* publishing lottery results.⁷⁹ But in the contest, particularly with the English press, Hindi newspapers tended to regard any advertisement as a good advertisement. "Now we have reached a stage," Ashwini Kumar said,

where we need not go and tell the advertising agencies, "Look here, we are running a newspaper and you should give [an] ad to us." Now the ad agencies ... approach us. We need not ... do [the] convincing.

⁷⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities* p. 38. Anderson acknowledges McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy*, p. 153: "Print was the first mass-produced thing, so it was the first uniform and repeatable 'commodity'."

⁷⁸ Interview, Ashwini Kumar, Resident Editor, *Punjab Kesari*, New Delhi, 6 May 1993.

⁷⁹ Interview, Sheela Padmanabhan, Corporate Adviser, *Sakal*, Pune, 19 March 1993.

By the 1990s Indian-language newspapers had made their mark on manufacturers and advertising agencies.

Eenadu at the same time devised programs to educate the Telugu people in the rewards of advertising, an activity with which Telugus were not familiar.⁸⁰ It regularly hired batches of advertising sellers, trained them for fifteen days and gave them territories in small towns and villages. Each representative carried a collection of sample ads to attract prospective advertisers both with their glamour and economy – in effect, to put before them, "a new glory in the print elevation" of Telugu, a language "they had humbly spoken all along".⁸¹ In 1993 *Eenadu* was said to have up to 3,000 advertising agents at work at any time,⁸² though the turnover was constant. In a batch of twenty, only three or four might stick to the job, which paid Rs 750 a month plus commission. But people with only high-school education could rise in the organization if they proved their worth, according to an assistant manager who said he himself had risen in that way.⁸³ Do we hear a Telugu Willie Loman setting down his suitcase in a small flat in Vijayawada?

Paid obituary notices, which *Eenadu* began to promote in the late 1980s, proved another valuable category. Obituaries required delicate negotiations with the deceased's relatives and friends who had to be shown model advertisements. For a sensitive seller with good connections, obituaries had added reward because various ceremonies after the funeral might also be advertised. The Rs 6,000, which a full page in an *Eenadu* district tabloid cost in 1993, could often be found by encouraging a number of friends and relatives to club together. A single death, uniting a notable deceased with an energetic *Eenadu* agent, could even generate a sixteen-page supplement. Sales-agent banter included speculation about how many pages of obituary-supplement a particular politician might be worth.⁸⁴

Matrimonial advertisements, solicited in consultation with wedding photographers, could be extended into a regular earner by keeping track of anniversaries and the birth of children. In 1993, *Eenadu* in Vijayawada kept much of this information on computer and fed details regularly to its agents. Able salespersons kept their own notes and reminded

⁸⁰ Interview, Jagdish Prasad Kanuri, Managing Director, Andhra Printers, Hyderabad, 13 March 1993.

⁸¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 77.

⁸² Interview, Piush Bahl and I. Venkat, Advertising Manager, *Eenadu*, Hyderabad, 25 February 1993. About 1,000 worked solely as *Eenadu* employees.

⁸³ Interview, P. Hema Shekhar, Assistant Advertising Manager, *Eenadu*, Vijayawada, 8 March 1993.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

potential advertisers in time to take an ad to celebrate a wedding anniversary, a birth or a birthday.

In the 1980s, therefore, the advertising departments of Indian-language newspapers were transformed. Where once sat an "advertising manager", middle-aged, perhaps wearing a dhoti, surrounded by ledgers, and with a bell on his desk to summon peons, by 1993 there was a "marketing manager (advertising)". The person was likely to be a man, but it was possible for it to be a woman. Either way, they would be in their late twenties or thirties, hold a Master of Business Administration degree and have a computer on their desk. They looked at surveys, used census data and mounted campaigns to convince major advertisers of the extent and "quality" of their publication's readership. They touted proudly for ads in a way that would have made many of the earlier generation of editors and proprietors ashamed. They did so because advertisements now were essential to maintain a newspaper and secure its future. Even *Siasat* of Hyderabad, whose owner took pride in the fact that the paper did not send agents out to pursue ads, ran at 50 per cent advertising to editorial content in 1993.⁸⁵ Consumed by millions of new readers, the printed word was brought to them, as the sponsor's message goes, by capitalism.

"90 under the banyan tree"

In the triangular relationship of Indian-language newspapers, advertisers and advertising agencies, one element has usually been deficient: effective advertising copy that captures nuances in a dozen languages. In the past, if a national advertiser decided it was worth using Indian-language publications, the advertisement was sometimes left in English, with a picture of the product, on the assumption that people who could afford such an item would be able to find out what the copy said. More ambitiously, an agency might hire a translator to take the English copy into an Indian language. In this method, "we've let the cat out of the bag" was bewilderingly translated word for word into Hindi: "*ab humne thaile se billi nikal di*".⁸⁶ A celebrated example of the confusion that might ensue came from the early efforts of Horlicks to advertise in Indian languages. The English-language advertisement began with the line "When it's 90 in the shade..." In translation, this became "When there are 90 people under the banyan tree..."⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Interview, Zahid Ali Khan, editor and owner, *Siasat*, Hyderabad, 3 March 1993. See, for example, *Siasat*, 8 February 1993, a 10-page paper, just over 50 per cent of which was advertising.

⁸⁶ *A&M*, 15 January 1999, p. 18.

⁸⁷ Doctor and Alikhan, *India Magazine*, December 1996, p. 52.

Professionals long recognized that such copy was "wooden and soulless" and "completely devoid of the spontaneity, rhythm and freshness of the original".⁸⁸ But even in the mid-1990s, the quality of advertising copy in Indian languages was said to be "abysmal". Only "the top agencies" had "resident Hindi and Tamil writers", while most advertising agencies had a single "'language co-ordinator', usually an over-worked junior", who was responsible for farming out work to freelance translators.⁸⁹

In the 1990s, Indian-language advertising and its designers occupied a position comparable to that of Indian-language newspapers twenty years before: the poor relations of the English language. Yet watchful marketers recognized that Indian languages and regional cultures rewarded sensitive attention. Campaigns tailored to individual regions – a detergent that dissolved coffee stains in a Tamil ad but fish blood in the Bengali version, for example – brought what advertising people described as "that emotional payoff".⁹⁰ Practitioners disagreed, however, about whether their position was improving significantly. "All we have", one lamented in the jargon of the trade, "is regurgitating colour-double-spread-me-toos reminiscent of British advertising in the 1970s, anchored in the nuances of one language – English."⁹¹ Others celebrated: "Hail! the great Hindi revival ... a movement that has now come of advertising age ... Has the sun set on the English copy writer?"⁹² As the efficacy of cunning advertising in Indian-languages became clear, the status of the creators was expected to improve dramatically. By 1994, "a new world of opportunity for regional [i.e. Indian-language] advertising" had opened up, and agencies bemoaned "a shortage of copywriters".⁹³ People in marketing encountered "an increasing regional reality" that forced them "to think in the regional [language] medium" if they were to succeed in selling their products in small-town and rural India.⁹⁴

Practitioners agreed that effective advertising had to echo local cultures, use local allusions and answer the question, "How do I touch the heart of a viewer [or reader] in Kota?" They believed that "emotions in the vernacular are what really work". They praised campaigns like the one for a cooking oil, specially packaged for Bengal, which played

⁸⁸ Kurian, "The Year in Advertising, 1971-2," *PAYB*, 1973, p. 137a. Coomy B. Chinoy, "Writing ads for language papers", *Indian Press*, December 1976, p. 51.

⁸⁹ Shashank Joshi, Managing Director, Better Communications, quoted in *BI*, 4-17 December 1995, p. 154.

⁹⁰ *BI*, 4-17 December 1995, p. 155.

⁹¹ Kiran Khalap in *A&M*, 30 June 1995, p. 30.

⁹² Geeta Rao in *A&M*, 28 February 1995, p. 23.

⁹³ *Tol*, 27 September 1994, p. 7.

⁹⁴ *A&M*, 15 January 1999, p. 18.

on the phrase *nakh uchu*, “peculiar to Bengali, denoting a certain affectionate nose-in-the-air attitude”.⁹⁵ The process illustrated a truism: the success of international techniques of marketing and advertising depended on the dexterity with which they were adapted locally. The challenge, one leading practitioner said, was to take great advertising concepts and “go out and do it better – in your language”.⁹⁶

The advertising boom that impelled the expansion of Indian-language newspapers ran counter both to Mahatma Gandhi’s vision of a simple, rurally revived India and Jawaharlal Nehru’s ideal of Indian socialism. Critics in the 1990s similarly argued that advertising represented “sheer unproductive waste of resources” and its influence over media meant that it “can effectively determine both focus and content”. Advertising could both manipulate and divide by creating insatiable demands for unnecessary products.⁹⁷ Yet the process seemed irresistible: advertising drove the expansion of newspapers (and of course television) into ever-widening circles of India’s people. The wider the circle, the stronger the base seemed to become – and the greater the rewards for the media that succeeded in carrying the messages.

Advertising thus fuelled the drive to increase newspaper circulations and helped thereby to bring Indian-language newspapers into their own. But to acquire new readers newspapers had to change. They had to write about readers’ lives in ways that would have seemed parochial to many of the well-meaning nationalists who ran such newspapers until the 1970s. The technology now made it possible to expand circulation; the need for growing numbers of readers in order to win advertising made expansion a financial necessity. But to reach into small-town and rural India, Indian-language newspapers had to localize both their content and production.

⁹⁵ Kota, a town in southeastern Rajasthan (Hindi speaking), had a population of 537,000 in 1991. The question, stemming from the marketeer’s search for the ideal “average place” to test a product, recalls its American equivalent: “Will they buy it in Peoria?”. *BI*, 4-17 December 1995, p. 155. *A&M*, 28 February 1995, p. 23 and 30 June 1995, p. 30.

⁹⁶ Interview, Ambika Srivastava, Associate Director and General Manager, Media Services, Lintas India, Mumbai, 22 January 1996.

⁹⁷ Jayati Ghosh in *Frontline*, 26 January 1996, p. 121.

4

LOCALIZING

The paradoxical connection between newspapers and capitalism appears most clearly when we examine the reasons why, and the ways in which, newspapers localize. In India, the connection stands out sharply because newspapers have grown steadily in circulation and readership from the late 1970s. Unlike the experience of Britain or the United States, where many newspapers have also striven to localize since the 1970s, the picture has not been complicated by falls in circulation and desperate competition with television.

What is the paradox? It is that newspapers are essential to the idea of "liberalism" as it has developed over the past two centuries. There can be no freedom for ideas to contend without media by which they do it, and newspapers have been the most important medium since the early eighteenth century. Yet these limousines in which liberalism rides are serviced, polished and kept on the road by narrow economic interests. "In the United States", Bagdikian wrote, "newspaper publishing continues to be an inherited privilege."¹ In industrialized countries, moreover, it is a privilege that fewer and fewer people share as newspapers are merged or closed and ownership becomes concentrated. Thus "liberty of ideas" depends increasingly on the good will, tolerance or benign sloth of a few dozen newspaper proprietors.

The second aspect of the paradox is that newspapers have been carried to broad audiences in industrialized societies – and are being carried ever more widely in India – because it is financially rewarding to do so. Newspapers do not seek readers because of an innate human desire to foster the free exchange of ideas, provide useful information or create informed "public opinion". Rather, newspapers push out to new readers when those readers demonstrate they are consumers or potential consumers. Newspapers localize because advertisers see a commodity that is worth buying: rural and small-town spending power.

As Indian-language newspapers push in fierce competition into towns and villages, we see the march of Indian capitalism and consumerism. It carries with it the possibility for ideas to contend and for an array

¹ Bagdikian, *Information Machines*, p. 116.

of “publics” to grow – public sphere, public interest, public opinion. But it also contains its own limitations and perhaps self-negation. First, the interests of even a few dozen newspaper-owning families will often – though not always – coincide. As we shall see in the chapters on owning and reporting, the people who produce newspapers are remarkably similar. Second, the number of owning families will almost certainly dwindle as concentration of ownership grows. To be sure, the “publics” that spread as a result of the newspaper revolution demonstrate change; they are part of a process that undermines and destroys older forms of domination and control; but they do not presage an age of glorious equality or a constant contest of ideas out of which good government grows. Newspapers are no doubt a necessary – but scarcely a sufficient – condition for such a polity. What the spread of newspapers signals is that people in the Indian countryside have money to spend.

This chapter explains how newspapers marched out of the cities into the towns and countryside in the 1980s and 1990s. Earlier, there was always talk about the need for newspapers to “improve” the peasantry and focus on the life of the rural majority. Some people who ran papers tried to do so. The founder of *Sakal*, Dr N.B. Parulekar (1897-1973), was one of the few who started a successful newspaper that showed some of these qualities, but *Sakal* owed much of its success to the literate, urbane population of its home city of Pune. On the whole small, well-meaning publications, run at a loss “as a missionary work”,² lacked the writers, technology and distribution system to attract new readers. Even experienced readers in the 1960s deplored the unattractive production values of smaller newspapers.³ It required the investment of excited capitalists to produce and distribute newspapers that were attractive to read. They did so because they needed readers in order to attract advertisers.

To spread, newspapers had to localize in at least three ways. The new printing technology was essential: it enabled production of newspapers closer to potential readers, so that the paper was readily available when the news was still fresh. Secondly, newspapers had to localize the news: they had to give people news about themselves. And thirdly, they had to create a standard written language that ordinary people could recognize, understand and enjoy.

Around the world, people who produce newspapers have long known that local news sells newspapers.⁴ In the United States, “growing numbers of papers, from the *Baltimore Sun* to the *Chicago Tribune*”, wrote Howard

² *Report...Small Newspapers*, pp. 22-3.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁴ Wilbur Schramm, *Men, Messages and Media. A Look at Human Communication* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), pp. 110-11.

Kurtz in 1993, "are concluding that the future is local, local, local."⁵ It is a tested recipe. When Lord Northcliffe's *Daily Mail* in 1906 ran a frightening, future-gazing series called "The Invasion of 1910" describing how Germany might invade Britain, the author chose his imaginary invasion route in a way that made military sense: it bypassed centres of population. But the *Mail*'s canny editors changed the route to include "as many place names as possible to add local interest". When the invaders reached London, the author "excelled himself by getting fourteen London placenames into the first twelve lines".⁶

Indeed, the combination that seems best to increase circulations involves local people in great events. Wars are excellent. Readers are fired with the thrill of the contest, and they also have friends and loved ones in the army: people at home want to know what is happening. War often provided the impetus to carry newspapers beyond the circles to which they were previously confined. In Britain, the famous steam-driven cylinder presses at *The Times*, which more than trebled the output possible from a single press, were introduced in November 1814, partly in response to the demand for news generated by the wars with Napoleon.⁷ The Crimean War in the 1850s and the South African War at the turn of the century similarly provided the incentive to deploy improved printing methods to reach new readers, who for economic and educational reasons were now available and worth cultivating. In the United States the Civil War of the 1860s and the Spanish-American War of 1898 were similarly good wars for newspapers. In France, in the 1860s, "the newspaper was still, like the white bread brought home from fairs, a rare urban delicacy, preserve of the privileged few." Partly as a result of the intense interest generated by the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1, circulations "tripled" and small newspapers, "read largely for their local news", began to flourish from the 1870s.⁸ In Russia "wars and revolutions", particularly the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-8, drove rural people to newspapers and the printed word.⁹ The proprietor of one of India's most successful district-based newspapers, *Saurashtra Samachar* of

⁵ Howard Kurtz, *Media Circus. The Trouble with America's Newspapers* (New York: Times Books, 1993), pp. 360, 362.

⁶ Mathew Engel, *Tickle the Public: One Hundred Years of the Popular Press* (London: Gollancz, 1996), p. 82.

⁷ James Moran, *Printing Presses: History and Development from the Fifteenth Century to Modern Times* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), pp. 105-8.

⁸ Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford University Press, 1976), pp. 467-8.

⁹ Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* (Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 28. Brooks says that the Crimean War in Russia had stimulated "demand for books and prints" (p. 96).

Bhavnagar in Gujarat, similarly recalled that the wars with Pakistan in 1965 and 1971 had been very good for circulation.¹⁰

Across India, the Bangladesh crisis and war with Pakistan in 1971 increased daily-newspaper circulations by about 10 per cent (Figure 2.1). Had the technology and the sense of potential markets existed in 1971, the newspaper revolution might have begun earlier. In fact, however, circulations slumped in 1972, and the newspaper and advertising industries stagnated under Mrs Gandhi's desperate "socialist" governments. It was only after the end of the "emergency" in 1977 that new printing technology and consumer demands coincided with the immense curiosity provoked by nineteen months of censorship. Conditions were right to encourage proprietors to expand.

Nothing done from the late 1970s was totally new. The establishment of a number of close-to-the-reader production centres, the focus on local news and the creation of simple prose styles were features of a few Indian-language newspapers as early as the 1940s. But now new centres, each capable of trawling for local stories and spreading simplified prose, became easier to establish. The rewards for increased circulation grew. And disaster – falling circulations, little advertising and rising costs – threatened newspapers that failed to find new readers.

Table 4.1. EXTENSION OF DAILY NEWSPAPER PRODUCTION, 1961-96

	1961	1976	1996
Number of dailies listed by ABC	101	110	181
Different places of publication	42	55	93
Dailies published from more than one place	12	21	47
Number of ABC dailies in English	18	23	20
English dailies published from more than one place	3	7	10

Sources: ABC July-December 1961; 1976; 1996.

We get a sense of the extent of the localization from calculations based on the records of the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC), whose members consisted of most of the keenly commercial newspapers. From 1976, the number of towns publishing ABC dailies rose from fifty-five to more than ninety (Table 4.1). In 1996, the ABC listed 181 dailies published from ninety-three towns and cities. India at this time had only about seventy towns and cities with populations greater than 400,000 people.¹¹ Places like Sangli in Maharashtra and Satna in Madhya Pradesh, neither of which had a population of 400,000, were publications centres. Sangli was home to *Dakshin Maharashtra Kesari* (circ. 17,400), while

¹⁰ Interview, Pratap T. Shah, Editor, *Saurashtra Samachar*, Bhavnagar, 3 February 1999.

¹¹ *SOI*, 1996-7, pp. 45-7, using 1991 Census figures.

Satna, somewhat larger, had rival dailies, *Dainik Bhaskar* (circ. 15,800) and *Desh Bandhu* (circ. 19,800), members of competing chains. By 1996, ABC dailies stretched into small towns from Berhampur in southern Orissa (*Sambad*: circ. 24,700) to Bhuj in western Gujarat (*Kutch Mitra* circ. 27,200).

Production

In the 1940s the Tamil daily *Dina Thanthi* (daily telegraph) pioneered techniques of publishing an Indian-language newspaper from a number of centres.¹² *Thanthi* was founded in 1942, not in Madras but 400 km. south in Madura, by S. P. Adithanar (1905-81), a lawyer trained in Britain who had practised in Singapore. In Britain, Adithanar admired the English tabloid, the *Daily Mirror*, for its ability to reach a mass audience.¹³ He aimed to bring out a Tamil newspaper that would make ordinary people want to read, thereby introducing them to the benefits, as he believed, of regular reading. Based in a provincial town, *Thanthi* used the public bus system to distribute the paper throughout the south of the Tamil region and capitalized on the hunger for war news that arose after the fall of Singapore to the Japanese. Even with such incentives, however, *Thanthi* found it difficult to produce from a number of centres. In the 1940s, Adithanar opened editions in Madras, Salem and Tiruchchirapalli, but the Salem edition soon failed while the Tiruchchirapalli attempt faltered and then had to be re-started in 1954.¹⁴

Thanthi emphasized local news, especially crime and the courts.¹⁵ It used photographs as extensively as the technology of the time allowed, and most memorably, it brought big banner headlines to Tamil journalism. Some veterans of the period disdainfully recall that *Thanthi* could take a broadsheet page to tell a single story, mostly in headlines that its newly literate readers could digest.¹⁶ A memorable example soon after

¹² C.G.K. Reddy considered *Thanthi* one of the most important breakthroughs in Indian journalism. Interview, C.G.K. Reddy, Bangalore, 19 April 1993.

¹³ C.P. Adityan, "Evergreen Youth" in *Dina Thanthi Golden Jubilee Magazine* (Madras: *Thanthi*, 1992). I am grateful to R. Padmanabhan of Wollongong and Trivandrum for the translation and lively discussion.

¹⁴ A.N. Sivaraman in Roland E. Wolseley (ed.), *Journalism in Modern India*, rev. edn (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1964; first publ. 1953), p. 26. J. Natarajan, *History of Indian Journalism*, pp. 201, 218. *PII*, 1958, p. 253. The Madras edition started in 1948.

¹⁵ Interview, K.S. Ramakrishnan, Director, Research Institute for Newspaper Development (RIND), Madras, 29 March 1993. *Business Line*, 23 October 1998, p. 6. Interviews, T.K. Rajagopal, Chief Executive Officer, Sovereign Media, D. Rajiah, General Manager (Administration), R. Thiruvadi, Chief Editor, *Dina Thanthi*, Chennai, 20 January 1999.

¹⁶ Interview, V. Ranganathan (b. 1919), former General Manager, Express Group, Bombay, 26 April 1993.

the paper's founding involved the murder of the editor of a scandalous film magazine by two actors. Covering the Madras trial in detail, *Thanthi* reporters phoned their account to the printing centre in Madura so that each day's events in the court circulated throughout the southern part of the Tamil region in *Thanthi*'s pages the following morning.¹⁷ This coup owed part of its impact to the place the film industry occupied in Tamil culture even in the 1940s.¹⁸ Crime, film stars and politics provoked a fascination which Adithanar understood and from which *Thanthi* benefited.¹⁹

In the past, if a daily reached the southern Tamil areas, it had been printed in Madras at least a day earlier. Adithanar brought a fresh paper to Tamil towns each morning – something most proprietors elsewhere in India began to do only forty years later. In 1961 only twelve dailies belonging to the Audit Bureau of Circulations published from more than one centre, but four of them were in Tamil (see Table 4.1).²⁰ *Thanthi* had shown how such organization could work, even with the technology of the time.²¹

By the time the "emergency" began fifteen years later, a few changes were noticeable. The Audit Bureau recorded twenty-one members publishing dailies from more than one centre in 1976, fourteen of them in Indian languages. Sometimes such multi-edition dailies were a way of dealing with divisions in the proprietors' families: one branch used the masthead in a different town and published what was virtually its own newspaper.²² Technology limited the connections and similarities that two centres could maintain. Because printing equipment was scarce, editions in other centres might get a cast-off press and inferior fonts of type, which made them look different from the headquarters version of the newspaper. A new publication centre might have a teleprinter link to headquarters and, if it were prosperous, to a news agency; it might keep in touch with headquarters on crackling phone lines; and it might carry the same features and editorials, though perhaps a day

¹⁷ Interview, K.S. Ramakrishnan, Madras, 29 March 1993.

¹⁸ See S. Theodore Baskaran, *The Message Bearers. The Nationalist Politics and the Entertainment Media in South India, 1880-1945* (Madras: Cre-A, 1981).

¹⁹ Robin Jeffrey, "Tamil: 'Dominated by Cinema and Politics'", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 8 February 1997, pp. 254-6.

²⁰ The latter often found it profitable to bring out an Indian-language daily from the same press that produced the English-language breadwinner. Once the English newspaper was printed, why not use the same news stories, printing plant and distribution system to make an Indian-language translation?

²¹ *ABC July-December 1961*.

²² *ABC January-June 1975*, p. 4. This seems to have been the case with a Jhansi edition of *ABC* in 1975.

late. Beyond that, and a common masthead, more exchange – or tighter control, depending on how one thought of it – was expensive and often impossible.²³

In Kerala in the 1950s the two dominant Malayalam dailies, *Mathrubhumi* and *Malayala Manorama*, each reigned like a king in its own small town and neighbourhood, Calicut in the northern part of the state for *Mathrubhumi*, and Kottayam in central Kerala for *Malayala Manorama*. In 1962 a struggle began between them that demonstrated the forces that would drive expansion of Indian-language newspapers. The contest also illustrated the difficulties if expansion had to rely on Gutenberg-style printing.

In 1962 *Mathrubhumi* started a second edition in Cochin, one of India's chief ports and Kerala's major urban area. The new edition sent *Mathrubhumi* to a circulation of 170,000 copies by 1964, 19,000 more than its rival, *Malayala Manorama*.²⁴ The opening of *Mathrubhumi*'s Cochin edition was a landmark in the transition of many Indian-language newspapers from loosely run, genteel adjuncts of the national movement to competitive businesses struggling for survival and profit. Ownership of the two papers differed. *Mathrubhumi*, begun in 1923, was unusual among Indian newspapers in that it was a public company with a number of shareholders. The best known of these was the founder of the paper, the British-trained barrister and nationalist, K.P. Kesava Menon. *Malayala Manorama*, on the other hand, was owned by the Kandathil family, which was the more common pattern. K.I. Varghese Mapillai (1858-1904) had started not only the newspaper in 1888 but the first joint-stock company in the Travancore princely state. Members of his Kandathil family also invested in agricultural estates and banking. They experienced adversity in 1938-47 when the Travancore government, outraged at political opposition, suppressed *Malayala Manorama* and harassed members of the family with legal cases. But the newspaper resumed publication in 1948 and was flourishing by the early 1950s, though *Mathrubhumi* was judged to be "the leading paper in [Malayalam]" in 1955.²⁵

Mathrubhumi's Cochin edition was intended to retrieve this status,

²³ J. Natarajan, *History of Indian Journalism*, p. 156, discussing *Nava Bharat*, which in 1954 published from Nagpur and Jabalpur, "though these publications are not identical in their editorial get up". By 1992, *Nava Bharat* also published from Raipur, Bhopal, Indore and Bilaspur. *INS Press Handbook, 1992* (New Delhi: Indian Newspaper Society, 1992), p. 481.

²⁴ *PAYB*, 1965, p. 95.

²⁵ J. Natarajan, *History of Indian Journalism. Part II of the Report of the Press Commission* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1955), p. 217.

lost in the late 1950s, when *Manorama* steadily passed it in circulation. Well-attuned to commerce, the Kandathil family interpreted *Mathrubhumi's* new centre in Cochin as a challenge to the long-term profit of *Malayala Manorama*. "We found", a member of the family explained, "that we had to expand."²⁶ Both sides knew that a larger circulation gave a newspaper the ability to charge higher advertising rates. And because no English-language daily was published in Kerala, a few national manufacturers advertised in Malayalam newspapers more than they did in Indian-language newspapers elsewhere. The dominant Malayalam newspaper would become the obvious choice and beneficiary of major consumer-goods companies like Hindustan Lever, the soaps and oils manufacturer. Malayalam newspapers thus became more sensitive to national advertising.

Malayala Manorama took four years to respond to its rival's Cochin edition; but in 1966, it too started a second edition – in Calicut, *Mathrubhumi's* own town. That it took four years to mount the challenge indicates the difficulties under which Indian-language newspapers laboured in the 1960s. The technology was not only crude; it was scarce, and so was investment capital, even, it appears, for a family like the Kandathils. In the 1950s, second-hand equipment, cast off by big-city English newspapers, might have trickled down to Indian-language newspapers. But the war with China in 1962 worsened India's international financial position, and foreign exchange to buy printing equipment was a low priority for the government. *Malayala Manorama* began in Calicut on 1 December 1966 with a cast-off press from the paper's base in Kottayam and hand-composed type.

It was hot-set type [and] hand-composing ... the works. We just brought one of our old machines [to Calicut] and we began with a staff of about 60-80 people.

[The paper was directed from Kottayam] by teleprinter and by trunk calls – we would say what the lead story would be – once or twice a day. And this depended on the teleprinter system. We wrote [the leader] in Kottayam and then it was sent overnight and we were actually one day late [in Calicut].²⁷

They built a circulation of about 28,000, which rose to 36,000 in 1967. *Mathrubhumi* retained an overall lead of 17,000 copies.²⁸ Within a year, however, *Malayala Manorama* took the other decisive step in localizing: it began reflecting readers' lives back to them.

Elsewhere in India, incentives of pride and profit led a few proprietors to start similar editions, in spite of the technical difficulties. In 1970

²⁶ Interview, Jacob Mathew, Resident Editor and General Manager, *Malayala Manorama*, Kozhikode, 3 April 1993.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *PII*, 1968, p. 234.

N. B. Parulekar opened a Mumbai edition of *Sakal*, his successful Marathi daily of Pune. In Rajasthan, where the press in the mid-1960s was judged to have “meagre resources, scanty revenues, small circulations, poor production and sub-standard editorial content”, *Rajasthan Patrika*, blossomed from 9,000 copies a day when it became a morning paper in 1966 to 21,000 a day by 1972.²⁹ In Uttar Pradesh the twinges of competition that led *Manorama* and *Mathrubhumi* to move into each other’s territory in the 1960s, led Kanpur-based *Dainik Jagran*, to start an edition in Gorakhpur in the east of the state in 1974. Y. M. Gupta said:

I went to Gorakhpur. I did the survey there – what the readers want ..., which newspapers are circulated in ... eastern UP. I found there was only one newspaper which was available to them, [and it] was *Aj*, that was coming out from Benares [Varanasi]. Benares to Gorakhpur [200 km.] – they were sending it by road! And invariably the newspaper was reaching late, you know sometimes nine o’clock, sometimes ten o’clock, sometimes in the evening. And the newspaper life is only one and a half hours to my mind, or maximum two hours, thereafter it becomes stale, it starts decaying ...³⁰

Jagran’s move into territory once leisurely covered by *Aj* provoked a response: *Aj* opened an edition in Kanpur, headquarters of *Jagran*, in April 1975.³¹ It was four years before circulation figures for that edition began to appear in the sacred book of the industry, the Audit Bureau of Circulations’ six-monthly list; but by the first half of 1979, *Aj* in Kanpur was selling a respectable 34,000 copies to hometown *Jagran*’s 85,000.³²

Even with the old technology, and under the tight economic controls of Mrs Gandhi’s governments, a few proprietors sought new readers by producing newspapers in new centres. *Eenadu*, the leading Telugu daily in the 1990s, exemplified the process. It began from Vishakhapatnam on 10 August 1974 with a print order of 4,000 copies, composed by hand and coming off an elderly flatbed cylinder press bought from Kerala for Rs 96,000. By the time *Eenadu* was admitted to the Audit Bureau of Circulations in the first half of 1976, it was selling 48,000 copies in a locality where Telugu circulations had been less than 5,000 just two years before. When it opened a Hyderabad edition during the

²⁹ It had begun in Jaipur as a single-sheet evening daily in 1956. *PAYB*, 1965, p. cxxxix. *PAYB*, 1967-8, p. 184c. *PAYB*, 1973, p. 150c. Crispin C. Maslog, *5 Successful Asian Community Newspapers* (Singapore: Asian Mass Communication Research Centre, 1985), p. 115.

³⁰ Interview, Y.M. Gupta, 11 May 1993.

³¹ Interview, V. Prasad, Director Development, *Aj* Group of Newspapers, Varanasi, 11 January 1994.

³² *ABC January-June 1979*.

"emergency" in December 1975, it became the largest selling Telugu daily with 60,000 copies. By 1996, *Eenadu* was produced from nine centres, all kept in close touch electronically, all printing on offset presses and setting copy by computer. It sold close to 600,000 copies a day.

From 1980, technology allowed *Eenadu* to cope with Andhra Pradesh's scattered readers, great distances and poor roads. Elsewhere in India, similar problems led other newspapers to similar techniques, though *Eenadu* remained an exemplar. Before 1982, as we have seen, production centres could be connected only by teleprinter, telephone and roads as poor as those *Malayala Manorama* and *Mathrubhumi* faced when they began to expand in the 1960s. And Andhra Pradesh was seven times larger than Kerala and had nothing like the concentrations of population. The difficulties of managing the three *Eenadu* centres of the 1970s – much less putting editions into still smaller towns – were great. What made the difference in the mid-1980s was the growing availability of Indian-made offset presses, modest personal computers and electronic transfer of copy over telephone lines. From about 1984, as computers, photocomposing and offset printing were introduced, a young editor poached from another Telugu daily, was given the job of using the technology to bring the Vijayawada, Vishakhapatnam, Tirupati and Hyderabad editions into systematic exchange and treatment of news. From 1986, as news editor of all the editions, based in Hyderabad, he oversaw the growth of a remarkable local news-gathering and disseminating organization.³³ As the fluctuations in *Eenadu*'s circulations suggest – note the fall in the late 1980s – the Telugu newspaper business had become highly competitive with six substantial dailies in the running³⁴ (see Table 4.2). By 1996, technical innovations made publication from nine towns relatively straightforward.

In Hindi-speaking areas, the competitive expansion, signalled when *Dainik Jagran* and *Aj* marched into each other's territory in 1974-5, became irresistible in the 1980s. At the beginning of 1980, *Aj* published from Varanasi and Kanpur and had an audited circulation of about 120,000 copies.³⁵ By 1993, *Aj* published from twelve centres throughout

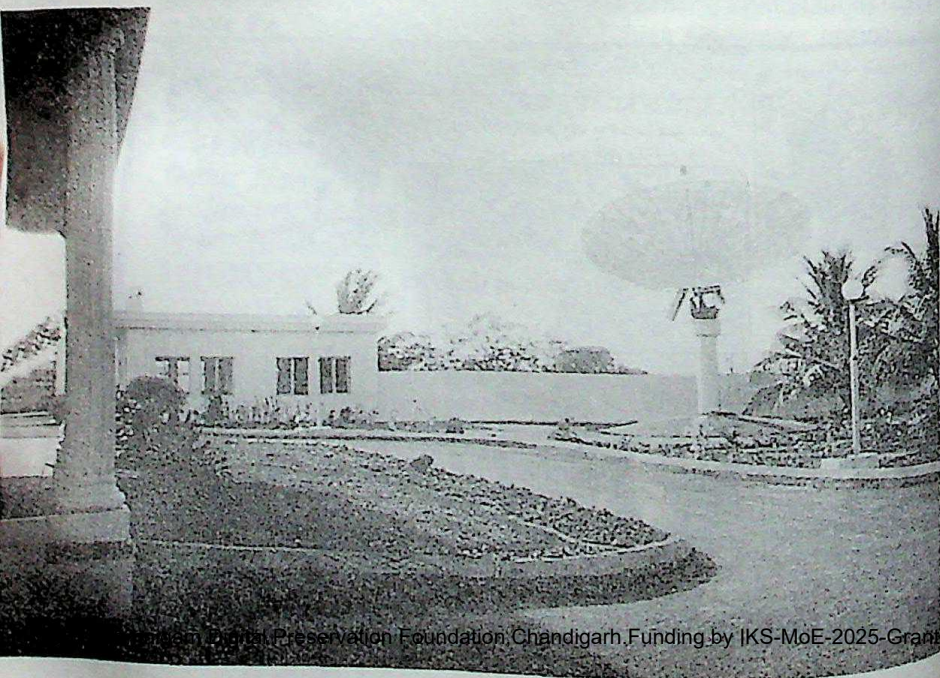
³³ Interviews, Ramesh Babu, Managing Director, Newstoday, Hyderabad, 27 February 1993. Newstoday is the news agency, run as a separate company, that "sells" news to *Eenadu* and its English daily, *Newstime*. The separate company appears to be a device to minimize taxation and the salary consequences of running companies with more than certain numbers of employees.

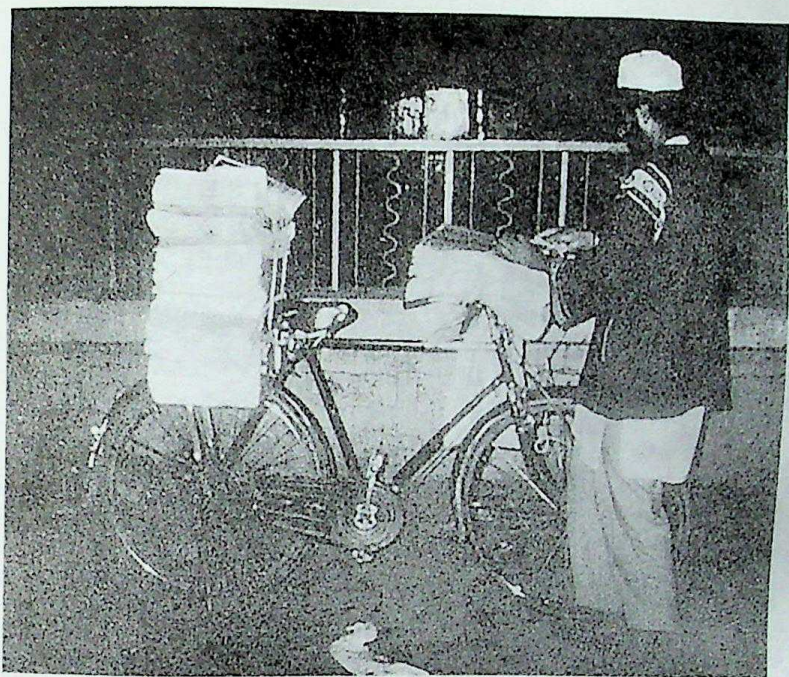
³⁴ *Eenadu*, *Andhra Patrika*, *Andhra Bhoomi*, *Andhra Prabha*, *Andhra Jyoti* and *Udayam*. Robin Jeffrey, "Telugu: Ingredients of Growth and Failure", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1 February 1997, pp. 192-5.

³⁵ *ABC January-June 1980*, p. 1.



*Above, Eenadu's just-opened production centre at Rajahmundry, March 1993.
Below, satellite dish, Eenadu's new premises, Rajahmundry, March 1993.*





Above, early morning in Hyderabad, March 1993: hawkers load *Siasat*, an Urdu daily. Below, a *Siasat* hawker ready to go.



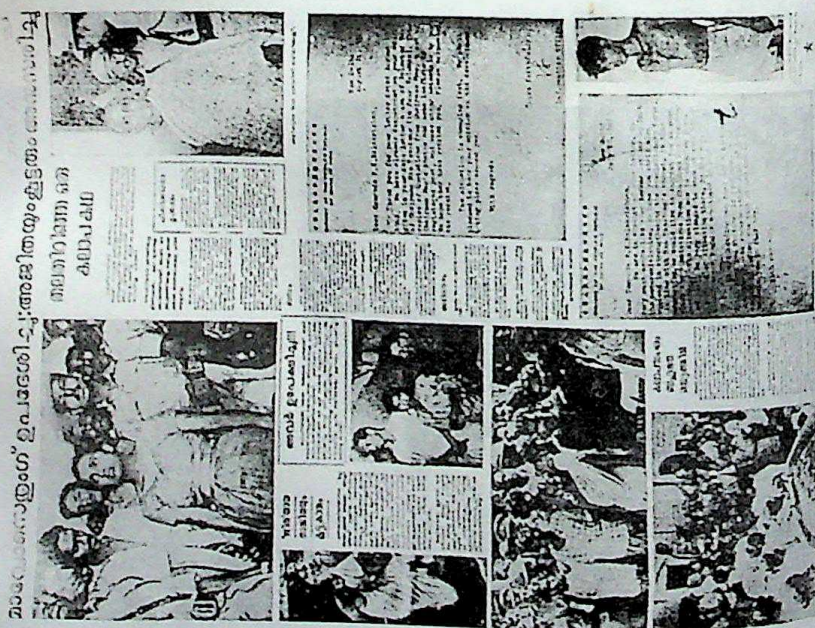


Table 4.2. EXPANSION OF PUBLICATION CENTRES OF EENADU, TELUGU DAILY, 1974-96

Place	Date	Total circulation
Vishakhapatam	August 1974	4,000 1st print order
Hyderabad	December 1975	all editions: 48,000 Jan.-June 1976
Vijayawada	May 1978	all editions: 167,000 Jan.-June 1979
Tirupati	June 1982	all editions: 347,000 Jan.-June 1983
Ananthapur	February 1991	all editions: 343,000 Jan.-June 1991
Karimnagar	March 1992	all editions: 317,000 Jan.-June 1992
Rajahmundry	September 1992	all editions: 403,000 Jan.-June 1993
Guntur	1995	all editions: 586,000 Jan.-June 1996
Suryapet	1995	as above

Sources: Interviews at Eenadu, March 1993. ABC for stated periods.

Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. The Sunday edition in 1994 claimed a circulation of more than 700,000.³⁶ By 1995, seven of the twelve centres had an audited circulation of 450,000, and this reached 570,000 copies in 1998. *Dainik Jagran* in 1998 published from eleven centres and had a circulation of more than 700,000.³⁷ Table 4.3 illustrates the spread of Hindi dailies into the towns of north India.

Newspapers expanded similarly in most of India. In 1980, the Audit Bureau of Circulations listed nineteen Indian-language dailies published from more than one centre – fifty-three towns in all. By 1996, the number of such newspapers had doubled to thirty-eight, and the number of centres trebled to 154. Nor was this a complete list, since it excluded a number of editions that were not audited.³⁸ Little-known towns like Rajahmundry in Andhra Pradesh, Moradabad in U.P., Cannanore in Kerala, Kolhapur in Maharashtra or Satna in Madhya Pradesh now produced daily newspapers that were part of local newspaper chains, struggling with rivals to push the newspaper under the eyes of new readers and consumers. In Rajahmundry, the white *Eenadu* office, four storeys high, newly built on the outskirts of town, impressively fenced and complete with large satellite dish, was a wonder of the neighbourhood in 1993. The Hindi dailies of north India often had more austere premises: old godowns and cheaply rented houses, once grand, now crumbling. But the important fact was that newspaper offices were becoming as much a feature of small-town India as bus-stands, post offices and temples.

³⁶ ABC January-June 1996, p. 2. Interview, T. G. P. Nair, 11 January 1994.

³⁷ ABC January-June 1996.

³⁸ ABC January-June 1980, pp. 3-7, and January-June 1996, pp. 2-6.

Table 4.3. MAJOR HINDI DAILIES (ABC MEMBERS) WITH MULTIPLE PUBLICATION CENTRES, 1998

	Begun	Headquarters	Other centres	Circ. 1998 (thousands)
<i>Aj</i>	1920	Varanasi	Patna, Allahabad, Ranchi, Agra, Jamshedpur, Lucknow, Kanpur, Bareilly, Gorakhpur (Dhanbad, Gwalior)	571
<i>Amar Ujala</i>	1948	Agra	Bareilly, Meerut, Moradabad, Kanpur, Allahabad, Aligarh, Jhansi, Dehradun	450
<i>Dainik Jagran</i>	1947	Kanpur	Agra, Bareilly, Jhansi, Varanasi, Gorakhpur, Lucknow, Meerut, Moradabad, New Delhi, Dehradun	701
<i>Dainik Bhaskar</i>	1958	Bhopal	Jabalpur, Gwalior, Indore, Bilaspur, Raipur, Satna (Jhansi, Jaipur)	478
<i>Desh Bandhu</i>	1959	Raipur	Bilaspur, Satna (Bhopal, Jabalpur)	99
<i>Hindustan</i>	1936	New Delhi (Hindustan Times chain)	Patna	395
<i>Jansatta</i>	1983	Mumbai (Indian Express chain)	Chandigarh, Calcutta, New Delhi	97
<i>Navbharat Times</i>	1950	Mumbai (Times of India chain)	New Delhi	419
<i>Nava Bharat</i>	1938	Nagpur	Raipur, Jabalpur, Bhopal, Bilaspur, Indore, Gwalior	465
<i>Punjab Kesari</i>	1966	Jalandhar	New Delhi, Ambala	780
<i>Rashtriya Sahara</i>	1992	Lucknow	New Delhi	189

Notes: Circulation figures are from *ABC January-June 1998* and do not include all publication centres. Additional publication centres, based on *INS Press Handbook 1995* (New Delhi: Indian Newspaper Society, 1995), are in parentheses. The table includes only ABC members.

In 1976 in Kerala, India's most newspaper-hungry state, *Malayala Manorama*, *Mathrubhumi* and *Deshabhimani*, the daily of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), each published from two centres, but only three towns were involved – Kottayam, Calicut and Cochin. Trivandrum, the capital, was the preserve of *Kerala Kaumudi*, though other newspapers reached there from other centres during the day. By 1996, five newspapers had more than two dozen production centres in nine towns. Cannanore, a small town in the north of the state, which did not have a major daily of its own in 1993, now had four. The technology made it possible

and the economic pressures made it appear necessary, to battle for readers in Kerala in the 1990s as Hearst and his rivals had done in New York a century before.³⁹ *Malayala Manorama* was said to be telling its employees that Kerala was a metropolis and it was their job to make *Malayala Manorama* the metropolis' daily newspaper.⁴⁰

Bengali and Oriya were exceptions to this trend, though circulations in Oriya trebled between 1983 and 1993, even with few extensions of publication centres.⁴¹ In West Bengal, however, the newspaper industry remained stuck in Calcutta. *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, the largest Bengali daily and nationally influential with English-language publications like the daily *Telegraph* and weekly *Sunday*, maintained only a single Calcutta publication centre. It supplied the rest of the state in the leisurely old way – by sending bundles of newspapers by bus, train, taxi and van. Two perceptions may explain the lack of expansion: that worthwhile intellectual life was based in Calcutta and that no significant market existed in rural West Bengal. Both perceptions may have begun to change by the mid-1990s.⁴²

To increase circulations, however, it was not enough simply to produce a newspaper closer to its readers. A newspaper had also to localize its content.

News

British newspapers in the 1930s discovered that the items to which readers turned were "accidents, weather, local news and crime and divorce". The United States was similar in the 1970s. "How *near* the news seemed to the reader" was crucial in determining whether a reader chose to read a story.⁴³ Yet in India local news was largely neglected. In the 1950s, S. Natarajan mused that "Indians have not yet come to look upon the press as something of intimate relation to themselves." Newspapers devoted most of their space to state and national politics, covered by agency reports and one or two correspondents. A decade

³⁹ W.A. Swanberg, *Citizen Hearst* (New York: Bantam, 1971; first published 1961), pp. 93-101.

⁴⁰ Interview, Jose T. Thomas, freelance editor, Kottayam, 25 January 1999.

⁴¹ Robin Jeffrey, "Oriya: 'Identifying... with Newspapers'", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 15 March 1997, pp. 511-14. Oriya circulations were 227,000 in 1983 and 897,000 in 1993. *PII*, 1984, p. 33. *PII*, 1994, p. 36.

⁴² Robin Jeffrey, "Bengali: 'Professional, Somewhat Conservative' and Calcuttan", *EPW*, 25 January 1997, pp. 141-3. Interview, P.K. Roy, Editor-in-Chief, *Ajkal*, Melbourne, 1 April 1997, in which he described plans for district-based newspapers.

⁴³ *Report on the British Press* (London: Political and Economic Planning, 1938), p. 30. Schramm, *Men, Messages and Media*, p. 110.

later, the widely experienced P.K. Roy lamented "a tremendous lack of enterprise in the Indian Press", and D.R. Mankekar suggested that perhaps "our journalism is not efficient and skilled enough to capture the potential readership which is waiting to be tapped".⁴⁴

Many editors and some proprietors disdained village-well coverage, which they believed was beneath a serious newspaper. As late as the 1990s, the proprietor of the largest Kannada daily described the condition:

Prajavani is ... not a popular kind of paper. [...] The old editors of *Prajavani* ... were totally non-local. They had this [practice] for example to put only international news on page one.

Prajavani ... is so national, international. It is not local at all. Even now the latest monthly report from [the] circulation department says that local coverage is not adequate in *Prajavani*.⁴⁵

There were at least two reasons for this tendency. First, editors in the past often saw themselves as intellectuals and nationalists. Their duty was to reform and improve their readers by defending and disseminating higher forms of culture. Proprietors, if they employed an editor, were often content with such policy because their Indian-language newspaper may not have been their most important profit-maker. And they may have shared with the editor a pride in carrying fine language, and news of great national and international events, to those who were unable to read English. If a whiff of “social work” wafted gently around most of the old nationalist newspapers, it hung even more heavily on those published in Indian languages.

Second, news-gathering is expensive, difficult and troublesome. It cost 90 per cent more money to publish local news than national news, a US survey found in the 1960s.⁴⁶ Reporters – even stringers – had to be recruited, trained, supervised and paid. They had to have money for expenses, and their stories had to be transmitted to the publication centres. They also increased a newspaper's risks. An item about Winston Churchill, Mao Tse-tung or Bill Clinton in a Hindi daily of Jabalpur was unlikely to bring a howling mob to the door of the newspaper. An item about a local trader, religious festival or construction contract might. On the other hand, if a newspaper could afford a news service – the Press Trust of India (PTI) or United News of India (UNI) – then it was simple to take the English-language copy from the wire and have a few sub-editors translate it. Feature articles might be accepted from

⁴⁴ S. Natarajan, *History of the Press in India*, p. 323. Roy and Mankekar are in Mankekar (ed.), *What Ails the Indian Press?*, pp. 18 and 7.

⁴⁵ Interview, K.N. Harikumar, Editor-in-Chief, *Prajavani* and the *Deccan Herald*, and Managing Director, The Printers Ltd, Bangalore, 20 April 1993.

⁴⁶ Bagdikian Preservation Foundation, Ch28, digarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

distinguished local educators, social workers and retired administrators. Preaching was cheaper than reporting.⁴⁷

A few Indian-language newspapers, such as *Dina Thanthi*, the Tamil daily, were different, as we have seen. So too was *Sakal*, the chief Marathi newspaper of Pune. Begun in 1932, *Sakal* was ridiculed for introducing North American styles of local reporting. Its founder Dr Parulekar, who did a PhD at Columbia University in New York, returned to India at the time of Gandhi's 1930-4 civil disobedience movement against British rule. Influenced by US journalism and fired with the message of "social change through regeneration of the masses",⁴⁸ Parulekar aimed to run a newspaper that would reach and serve "the people". It emphasized issues that affected readers and covered local news in a detail unusual for India at the time. Like Gandhi in South Africa, Parulekar ran a competition for a name for the paper, and according to the legend of the newspaper, he received 1,500 entries. He declared *Sakal* – "morning" – the winner. The word fitted Parulekar's view of what a newspaper should be – timely and related to the concerns of the day for ordinary people.⁴⁹ A celebrated early feature was a weekly report on prices in local vegetable markets. The old elite, accustomed to weekly newspapers with lots of opinion but little "news" as Parulekar understood it, laughed at *Sakal's* interest in vegetables. Surely such a newspaper was meant for cooks and servants. Parulekar persevered, the feature grew popular, and in 1949 *Sakal* began a "kitchen garden" competition to encourage people to grow vegetables. It was still an important aspect of the newspaper's promotions in the 1990s.⁵⁰ *Sakal* became Pune's premier newspaper, an indispensable part of the day for hundreds of thousands of readers in the city and its surroundings.

Local sensitivity was crucial. *Sakal* did not acquire a large following in Mumbai. For many years, this was a matter of technology: the difficulty in getting sufficient quantities of a fresh newspaper from Pune to Mumbai. But in 1970, Parulekar started a Mumbai edition under his friend, P.K. Roy, who had been many years with the *Times of India*.⁵¹ After a small initial spurt that sent *Sakal's* combined circulation over 100,000 in 1971 (the year of the Bangladesh crisis and war with Pakistan), it

⁴⁷ The irreverent paraphrase of C.P. Scott comes to mind: "News is expensive, but comment is almost free."

⁴⁸ *Hitting the Headlines on the Maharashtra Horizon* (Pune: *Sakal*, n.d. [1992]), [p. 2]. Advertising promotional brochure.

⁴⁹ Interview, Sada Dumbre, Editor, *Saptahik Sakal*, Pune, 20 March 1993. "Sakal – Saga of Marathi Journalism", cyclostyled, n.d. (about 1992). *Independent*, 29 December 1990.

⁵⁰ Interview, Varunraj Bhide, Special Correspondent, *Sakal*, Pune, 20 March 1993. "Sakal – Saga of Marathi Journalism."

⁵¹ Interview, P.K. Roy, Editor-in-Chief, *Ajkal*, Calcutta, 29 December 1993.

dropped back to 93,000 in the mid-1970s.⁵² In 1998, the Mumbai edition of *Sakal* sold 48,000 copies; Pune, 290,000.⁵³ The earnest sensitivity to Pune, which was *Sakal*'s strength, did not help it in Mumbai, where there were entrenched competitors and few places to grow vegetables.⁵⁴

Newspapers around India slowly recognized that outstanding coverage of local news could electrify and magnetize. Each region came to such discoveries in its own way, but a celebrated example from the rivalry between *Malayala Manorama* and *Mathrubhumi* illustrates how it took hold in Kerala.

In November 1968, *Malayala Manorama*'s challenge to *Mathrubhumi* in Calicut was two years old. In the early morning of Sunday, 24 November, a party of renegade Marxist-Leninists or "Naxalites", disillusioned with the moderation of their former party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), which now led the state government in Trivandrum, attacked the Pulpalli police station in the hills about 70km. northeast of Calicut. They killed a policeman, seized arms and smashed the police radio. The next day a six-column headline topped page one of *Malayala Manorama* – "POLICEMAN KILLED AT PULPALLI".⁵⁵

For the next month, as the story was told at *Malayala Manorama* in 1993, their team, led by reporter V.K. Bhargavan Nair (1930–95) and photographer Narayanan, consistently beat *Mathrubhumi* – in coverage of breaking news, interviews, background, colour and, perhaps most important of all, photographs. Bhargavan Nair and Narayanan produced a series of vivid stories and remarkable pictures which followed the pursuit and capture of the Pulpalli raiders. The story had everything – murder, mystery, local origins, national and international connections. It was happening in the interior of Malabar district, the area in which *Manorama* sought new readers; but it was also a story that linked Kerala with the world – with Naxalites (Maoist insurgents) in West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh, with Chairman Mao and the Chinese cultural revolution and with the war in Vietnam. "Shadow of fear", *Malayala Manorama* headlined its first editorial on the subject.⁵⁶ The "Pulpalli raid" passed into legend at the newspaper. A senior correspondent in 1993 identified it as the key example of the way in which local coverage attracted new

⁵² *ABC July-December 1971*, in *PAYB*, 1973, p. 94c. *ABC January-June 1974*, in *PAYB*, 1975, p. 86c.

⁵³ *ABC January-June 1998*, p. 4.

⁵⁴ Robin Jeffrey, "Marathi: Big Newspapers Are Elephants", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22 February 1997, pp. 384-8.

⁵⁵ *Malayala Manorama*, 25 November 1968, p. 1. I went through the files of the Kottayam edition; the treatment in the Kozhikode edition would have had minor differences because communications at that time limited the degree of direction possible from Kottayam.

⁵⁶ *Malayala Manorama*, 27 November 1968, p. 2.

readers. It demonstrated, he believed, the sorts of stories that sold newspapers and made them essential parts of people's lives.⁵⁷

The story also had a woman's angle. The leader of the raiders had an attractive, highly political daughter called Ajitha who had taken part in the raid. Her capture, and the photographs Narayanan took of her, created a sensation. In the twenty-five days between 25 November and 19 December 1968, the story was front page on all but six days. "The revolutionary story of Ajitha and her associates" on 2 December told readers that Ajitha was twenty-three, a clever student who had studied to the second year of a Bachelor of Arts degree. Her mother was a Gujarati, once headmistress of a Gujarati school but now said to be in Mumbai. That information was superseded next day – *Manorama's* front page carried a photograph of Ajitha's mother, just arrested by police. A late bulletin, timed 1 a.m., relayed an unconfirmed report that Ajitha herself had been arrested.

Indeed she had. The following day *Manorama* had photos of Ajitha and her comrades in custody and stories explaining their capture. She and her companions had been seized by peasants and delivered to the nearest police station at 9 p.m. on 2 December.⁵⁸ On 5 December, the newspaper turned page 3 into a picture page with six photos of the prisoners and reproductions of two letters. Dominating the page was a four-column photo of Ajitha, dressed in a blouse and trousers, centre of a crowd of police and onlookers; she held her head up but looked apprehensively away from the photographer. In the opposite corner was a two-column picture of her mother under police guard. A three-column picture at the bottom of the page showed her standing as an exhibit amid a throng of male onlookers, including laughing policemen, on the verandah of the Manantavadi police station. The caption said the police had made her stand on a stool so that onlookers could catch a glimpse of her. She nevertheless appeared dignified and self-contained. (More than thirty years later, Ajitha was getting somewhat different treatment in *Malayala Manorama*, as we shall see in the section on "Women" in Chapter 6.)

The story did not end with Ajitha's capture. There were reports of 500 "Naxalites" in the high country east of Tellicherry and of attacks on isolated landlords. *Manorama* explained the theory behind the Naxalites' plans – a Chinese model of revolution beginning in the countryside. Kerala politicians – especially members of the CPM – explained how the inexpert practice of Marxism resulted in such deplorable deviations from the genuine science. And in a three-part

⁵⁷ Interview, P. Gopi, Chief Correspondent, *Malayala Manorama*, Cannanore, 4 April 1993.

⁵⁸ *Malayala Manorama*, 4 December 1968, p. 1.

series Bhargavan Nair entertainingly described his experience with an ill-prepared police party sent out to search for a cache of equipment and lost for three days in the dense forest of the Wayanad. Bhargavan Nair's opening sentence focused on a thirsty constable asking the Assistant Superintendent of Police when they were going to find water.⁵⁹ The party was rescued eventually by a platoon of the Malabar Special Police, bearing rice and coffee. "We who entered the forest a small group", he concluded ironically, "came out three nights later as a great procession."⁶⁰ On 19 December, with most of the Naxalites arrested, the Governor of Kerala visited Pulpalli, and Bhargavan Nair's series ended.

Twenty-five years, two heart attacks and a bypass operation later Bhargavan Nair was Resident Editor of *Malayala Manorama's* Kottayam edition, having been founding editor of the group's English publication, *The Week*. He explained the zest that he and Narayanan brought to the Pulpalli assignment. "The *Mathrubhumi* man came" to Manantavadi on the day the police party and Bhargavan Nair left to comb the forest.

By the time he came ... we had already left. I was actually living in the police station ... What do you call it – the "legwork"? If I was sitting in the hotel and just telephoning all these things, I wouldn't be knowing. And if I had asked the ASP [Assistant Superintendent of Police] or the senior police official, they wouldn't have told me. I was actually making personal contact with the lower rank of the police.

"You have beedi? Cigarette?" He used to give me. That kind of rapport we had.⁶¹

When the story broke, *Manorama* editors were already aware that local news won new readers. To hold its own in Calicut, the newspaper had both to win over *Mathrubhumi* readers and create new ones. According to a member of the Kandathil family,

We realized that we were lacking [in local coverage], so we really could not get into the hinterland, and we had to break into *Mathrubhumi's* strong area, so this was one of the strategies we adopted.

Because *Mathrubhumi* was largely a product of an old, generally high-caste (in Kerala this usually means, Nair) nationalist movement, *Manorama* looked for stories among other social groups:

We really began to go into the internal area, covering the local features, local festivals, local events, and then we soon became actually the big supporter of the Muslim community, and we really started championing their causes, and we

⁵⁹ *Malayala Manorama*, 12 December 1968, p. 4.

⁶⁰ *Malayala Manorama*, 19 December 1968, p. 4.

⁶¹ Interview, V.K.B. Nair, Resident Editor, *Malayala Manorama*, Kottayam, 7 April 1993.

actually turned out to be a mouthpiece of the Muslim organization. And also we started going into the Tiyya community. And [at] certain events like the death of [an important Muslim] leader, we had somebody stationed in the house giving commentary on the whole thing. And certain events like that we really capitalized. That brought up our circulation steadily.

People would get onto the scooters ... in the morning with a photographer, and we would just go into the hinterland, tackle local problems ... and go ... into the real villages. [...] Everybody did every job here [in Calicut] at that time.⁶²

Malayala Manorama in Calicut thus developed a style of local reporting that allowed it to make the most of "the Pulpalli raid". Bhargavan Nair knew what was expected, and the newspaper was ready to put up the money to get the stories and pictures. This sense of urgency, and willingness to pay, were themselves departures from the genteel style of many Indian-language newspapers. Bhargavan Nair stayed close to the police and, most of the time, to a telephone:

I was sleeping on the verandah of the police station because by midnight or 1 o'clock in the morning or 2 o'clock in the morning, these people [police informants] ... would inform the police. So when somebody was brought [in and arrested], then immediately I [would] go [and report to *Malayala Manorama* in Kottayam].

There was a bank, and I asked the banker: "I am from *Manorama*. Will you please allow me to telephone?" He told the watcher outside whenever I come to open it and give me the telephone. After 2 o'clock, 3 o'clock, I used to telephone: "These people were brought, etc." We were able to give more information than any other paper, even *Mathrubhumi* [which] was our competitor ...

When I was in the police station I used to talk to the ordinary policemen. One day one fellow told me, "Sir, are you coming tomorrow with us?"

"Where are you going?"

"We are going to the forest to comb." There was a rumour that there was a dead body in the forest, and ... the guns and ... a cache with all these things in the forest. This fellow told me that two prisoners from Calicut were being brought tomorrow morning. So I went and saw the officer, the DSP.

"Who told you?"

"Don't ask that question. I am asking you a question whether you are going out."

"Who told you without my permission? Yes, we are going."

"Then I shall accompany you."

"No, no, no, you cannot come with me."

"Don't worry. You don't have to take me in your vehicle. I will have another vehicle. It's a public road."

"All right."

The colourful story of the ill-prepared combing party transfixed Kerala for nearly a week. "It was a scoop", Bhargavan Nair said,

⁶² Interview, Jacob Mathew, Resident Editor and General Manager, *Malayala Manorama*, Calicut, 3 April 1993.

and circulation went up to about one lakh [100,000] over the next year. At that time it was about 26,000 [for the Calicut edition] and we went up [at once] to 40-50,000.

The detail of the coverage matched the intense curiosity of Kerala's people and thereby created new readers. Moreover, the quality of the coverage was unusual – the liveliness of the writing, the readiness of the reporters to ask questions that ordinary people wanted answered (what did the mother do? where had the girl gone to school?) and the generous use of carefully composed, well-reproduced photographs. Readers experienced a reflected glory: a story about them and their neighbours was being treated with as much space and as many photographs as if it were a visit from the prime minister.

The rise in circulation resulting in part at least from coverage of the "Pulpalli raid" testified to the success of *Malayala Manorama's* Calicut venture. At the end of 1968 when the story broke, *Mathrubhumi* led in total circulation – 213,000 newspapers from its Calicut and Cochin editions. In the next two years, *Malayala Manorama* added a remarkable 99,000 copies to take a circulation lead it retained into the 1990s (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4. COMPARATIVE TOTAL CIRCULATIONS, *MATHRUBHUMI* AND *MALAYALA MANORAMA*, 1968-98 (thousands)

	1968	1970	1970	1981	1998
<i>Mathrubhumi</i>	213	244	249	344	719
<i>Malayala Manorama</i>	196	295	336	540	1,014

Sources: PII, 1968, pp. 121-2. ABC July-December 1970; 1976; 1981; ABC January-June 1998. *Mathrubhumi* was published from three centres in 1981 and six in 1998; *Malayala Manorama* was published from two centres in 1981 and seven in 1998.

The competition, of course, was over advertising as well as readers. In the mid-1960s, *Mathrubhumi* as the highest-circulating daily in Malayalam had an advertising rate 10 per cent higher than *Manorama's*; by 1973, their rates were the same; by 1981, *Manorama's* was double *Mathrubhumi's*.⁶³ In short, the compulsions of capitalism increasingly propelled the Malayalam newspaper industry. The process began earlier in Kerala than in many areas of India, as the acclaim for Bhaskaran Nair's "leg work" in 1968 indicates, but it overtook most of the country from the end of the "emergency" in 1977. The process forced newspapers to increase circulations if they were to win advertisements. And the way to increase circulations was, as *Malayala Manorama* showed, by

⁶³ PAYB, 1965, p. 94. PAYB, 1973, pp. 73c-74c. PAYB, 1981, pp. 96c-97c. In 1981, *Malayala Manorama* charged Rs 80 for a single column centimetre; *Mathrubhumi* Rs 40. The difference in circulation, Calicut and Cochin, 1981-98, was 1,000,000.

going to small towns and the countryside and giving people news about themselves.

Vivid examples come from around India of newspapers' detecting the need to localize and finding ways to attract readers. *Punjab Kesari*, based in the provincial town of Jalandhar in Punjab, was India's largest selling Hindi daily from the late 1980s. An idiosyncratic newspaper at which "serious" editors sometimes scoffed, its front and back pages each day did not carry news but rather, a garish colour magazine. News began on page 3. On 2 May 1993, for example, the day after the spectacular assassination of President Ranasinghe Premadasa of Sri Lanka, *Punjab Kesari* held to its normal format: the Premadasa story was on page 3. On page 1, the magazine appeared as usual: nine colour photos, cinema tittle-tattle, a feature on para-gliding and a column of travel and reflection by Vijay Chopra, the editor and eldest surviving male member of the owning family.⁶⁴

The *Punjab Kesari* formula dated from the "emergency" when, according to Ashwini Kumar, grandson of the founder, it happened by force of circumstance:

Democracy was really shattered ... my grandfather, with all that political background and freedom fighting, ... he resisted the censorship and they were very harsh on us. [...] They cut our electricity ... They imposed censorship on the papers. They didn't allow us to publish news items.

That's how this concept of magazine on the front page came. We told the censors, "Okay, if you don't allow us to publish the news, please allow us to publish some stories. At least we have to print the paper, we have to give something to the readers." So it just so happened we started putting the magazine on the front. News had become less important in those days, and people knew that nobody was going to give the unbiased ... kind of news that people wanted to read. [...] On the front page we started giving the magazine.

And by the time when [the] emergency was finished, you'll be shocked to hear that our circulation ... rose from 60,000 to 1 lakh and 20,000 [120,000] – the only paper that got the increase during the emergency. It was because of a number of reasons. Because my grandfather was arrested and then they cut our electricity, so people knew that this paper is fighting, and when we gave the magazine on the front page, it was a message to our readers: "Look here, they don't allow us to publish the news, so we are giving you [a] magazine."

When the "emergency" ended in 1977, *Punjab Kesari*, according to Ashwini Kumar, went back to traditional newspaper style – news on the front page. But

when we started doing that, our circulation started coming down. We did a survey with the readers. We said, "What is this?" They said, "No, we like this style. Why

⁶⁴ *Punjab Kesari*, 2 May 1993. All this – a 16-page newspaper – for Rs 1.50, less than the price of a cup of tea.

don't you carry on with it?" That's how [it happened]. Finally we came to this conclusion, that the readers are – of course they're interested in news and every thing – but they are also interested in magazines.

The figures of the Audit Bureau of Circulations largely bear out Ashwini Kumar's account. During the "emergency", when daily circulations fell in India as a whole, *Punjab Kesari's* circulation rose by 40 per cent.⁶⁵ It fell once thereafter – in the first half of 1981, presumably after a post-"emergency" attempt to go back to the old news-on-the-front-page format. By 1982, however, it had recovered to exceed 200,000. In six years, circulation quadrupled.

Until 1983 when it opened a Delhi edition, *Punjab Kesari* published only from Jalandhar. But it used every technique to distribute its newspapers wherever they could find buyers. Milkmen bringing milk to towns in the morning carried newspapers back to their villages, as did postmen, students and teachers. "Copies even go overseas", a foreign observer wrote in 1979, "flown to London for sale in the suburb of Southall."⁶⁶ As technology made it easier to open additional production centres, the circle of potential readers steadily widened.

Eenadu in Andhra Pradesh provides perhaps the most striking evidence of bringing news closer and closer to readers. The "district dailies", created from 1989 to generate local advertising, depended for their success on local news. They were also consistent with the ideas of Ramoji Rao, *Eenadu's* proprietor. When he started the newspaper in 1974, he believed that existing Telugu newspapers "were taking the readers for a ride". The leading daily, *Andhra Prabha*, owned by Ramnath Goenka's Indian Express chain, published four pages, two and half of which were advertisements. News was anything that happened at a distance. "What was [the] relevance for local people?" Though respecting Goenka in many ways, Ramoji Rao was appalled that someone with no knowledge of Telugu was producing the largest-selling Telugu newspaper. It was an "insult to the Telugu intellect".⁶⁷

Though Hyderabad was the capital of Andhra Pradesh, and Vijayawada was the commercial centre where Telugu newspapers were based, Ramoji Rao started his first daily in Vishakhapatnam where he already owned a hotel and had other business interests. A growing town with a naval base and surrounded by prospering agricultural country, Vishakhapatnam had no newspaper. It was estimated that because of its naval population, it took more English newspapers than Telugu ones,

⁶⁵ *ABC January-June 1975*, p. 6. *ABC July-December 1976*, p. 6.

⁶⁶ Graham Jones, *The Toiling Word. Nurturing a Healthy Press for India's Rural Millions* (Zurich: International Press Institute, 1979), p. 41.

⁶⁷ Interview, Ramoji Rao, Chairman, Ushodaya Enterprises Ltd, Hyderabad, 26 February 1993.

and the Telugu papers that did come (about 4,500 a day) lumbered up the narrow coast road from Vijayawada more than 300 km. away to arrive cold and stale in the afternoon.⁶⁸

He and his associates aimed to give the newspaper a "different personality", emphasizing local news. At first, they suffered a similar reaction to the one Parulekar and *Sakal* had experienced years before in Pune when they wrote about vegetable prices: some old readers, accustomed to a particular kind of newspaper, said this was not what a "real" newspaper did. Fairly rapidly, however, new readers were enthralled by the coverage of local events – by reading about themselves and the things that pleased, amused and annoyed them.⁶⁹

When *Eenadu* began a new phase of expansion in 1989, it introduced the "district dailies" to carry this local emphasis further. Each publication centre became responsible for a number of its neighbouring districts. For Rs 2 each morning, readers got eight or ten broadsheet pages of news about Andhra Pradesh, India and the world, as well as a tabloid with the equivalent of four or six broadsheet pages devoted to readers' own district. Both the broadsheet and the district inserts used colour photographs. All this represented an immense organizational and technical achievement. In the newsroom at each publication centre, a separate sub-editors' desk was set up for each district. A network of 1,400 stringers, sixty-five salaried reporters and 200 sub-editorial staff wrote and edited thousands of words each day from around the state.⁷⁰ Printers and packers produced and distributed scores of slightly different editions. Hawkers received two bundles: the broadsheet newspaper and the appropriate district tabloid for their locality. By 1993 *Eenadu* published more than 400 different newspaper pages each day and employed forty engineers.⁷¹

Eenadu's "district dailies" did not originate from philanthropic urges to improve the lives of people in the countryside, as such an enterprise might have been explained in the days of the nationalist movement. *Eenadu* started the district dailies in response to strong hunches, confirmed by market research, that heavy local content would generate new groups of readers and advertisers. The concept and execution succeeded impressively.⁷² The newspaper's circulation soared from a trough

⁶⁸ *PAYB*, 1973, p. 26b, estimated that the *Indian Express* sold 5,300 copies in Vishakhapatnam in 1972, *Andhra Prabha* 4,100 and *Andhra Patrika* 540.

⁶⁹ Interview, Ramoji Rao, Hyderabad, 26 February 1993. Typed answers, dated 10 March 1993, to questions submitted by R. Jeffrey to Ramoji Rao.

⁷⁰ Interview, Ramesh Babu, Hyderabad, 27 February 1993.

⁷¹ Interviews, Ramamohana Rao, Managing Director, *Eenadu* and *Newstime*, and G. Ram Mohan, Electronics Engineer, *Eenadu*, both Hyderabad, 2 March 1993.

⁷² See, for example, Kurtz, *Media Circus*, pp. 335-6, to learn how US papers, notably the *Washington Star*, tried similar devices but failed both technically and editorially.

of 264,000 a day at the end of 1987 to 708,000 at the beginning of 1998.⁷³ In the early 1990s, *Eenadu* overwhelmed other Telugu dailies to control more than 70 per cent of daily circulations in Telugu. Moreover, the surge in circulation, provoked by *Eenadu*'s extraordinary commitment to local coverage and distribution, plus fierce competition from a new rival, improved the penetration of Telugu dailies from something like ten per 1,000 people in 1991 to twenty per 1,000 by 1996.⁷⁴

Capitalists competing for readers drove this expansion. In 1996, a new Telugu daily, *Vaaritha*, was started by a rival family of industrialists with an ex-*Eenadu* editor and bitter critic of Ramoji Rao as the editor. *Vaaritha* used satellite links to publish from nine centres and boasted that "none is like the other. Each edition essentially becoming a truly independent voice, of a truly waiting people."⁷⁵ It quickly claimed a circulation of 350,000, yet *Eenadu*'s circulation also seemed to hold.⁷⁶ Such competition was constant, at least at this stage of newspaper expansion. *Dainik Bhaskar*, for example, launched a Jaipur edition in 1997 to challenge long-standing dominance in Rajasthan of *Rajasthan Patrika*.⁷⁷ The importance of such local competition lay in the way it drove newspapers to seek readers and tell their stories.

The localizing of news has repercussions, examined in following chapters. It creates opportunities to make money and gain influence for people who want to write and can meet newspapers' requirements. The idea that writing brings benefits – in status, influence, notoriety – becomes more widely diffused. Local coverage creates opportunities to publicize grievances, proclaim achievements and put enemies in hot water. When a newspaper office comes to town, a new piece appears on the chessboard of political and social life in a locality. It may change the entire game.

Language

Language was the third finger with which Indian-language newspapers touched localities. As well as producing newspapers closer to potential readers' homes, and publishing stories close to their lives, newspapers

⁷³ *ABC July-December 1987 and January-June 1998*.

⁷⁴ Calculated on 1,518,000 papers a day in 1996 and a Telugu population of 72 million. *PII*, 1997, p. 112. This allows for a 1.8 per cent a year increase in the 66.5 million population of Andhra Pradesh in 1991 or an estimated population of 72.5 million in 1996. More than 85 per cent of the population is Telugu-speaking.

⁷⁵ *A&M*, 15 February 1996, p. 45.

⁷⁶ *BI*, 8-21 April 1996, p. 147. In 1998, *Eenadu* was selling 708,000 copies a day. *Vaaritha*, 213,000. *ABC January-June 1998*.

⁷⁷ *BI*, 10-23 February 1997, p. 124.

had to write in language readers easily understood and enjoyed. The secret of *Dina Thanthi*, said the founder's grandson, himself proprietor of a Tamil daily, was that the "language is easy to read".⁷⁸ Successful newspapers searched for local styles and idioms to endear their writing to readers. At the same time, however, they were standardizing language and creating "acceptable" forms from an array of local variation. In this process, some local variations – a vivid turn of phrase, a particular spelling or pronunciation – were (and are) picked up and purveyed across the region. But this may be at the expense of similar distinctive styles in other localities. The latter may be overwhelmed by the force that the "foreign intruder" gains from having been consecrated by the newspaper. Regular, relentless columns of type have the impact of a marching army.

A linguist of Kannada provides an example of language change. The leading Kannada daily, *Prajavani*, took up a little-known – perhaps even a coined – word, "*kolegeeri*" for "slum". Suggested to the newspaper by a reader, the word caught on, in preference to the longer form – "*kolace pradesa*" – that newspapers had used hitherto. The attraction lay in the fact that *kolegeeri* was shorter, and, more important, had echoes of *holegeeri*, an "area inhabited by outcastes", which already had wide currency.⁷⁹ Throughout the world, wherever newspapers have grown up among diverse forms of spoken language, journalists have made such choices thousands of times, and in doing so, shaped and standardized language.

In English-speaking countries, the growth of a popular press depended on creation of newspapers that used simple prose and got quickly to the point. One of the first such papers, the *New York Sun*, founded in 1833, specialised in short, humorous accounts of court cases.⁸⁰ (Everywhere, crime sells). In Britain "the real newspaper revolution", Matthew Engel believes, was "the one the *Daily Mail* initiated" as late as 1896. The *Mail* not only carried the news of daily life in simple language but included serialized novels as well.⁸¹

Most Indian-language newspapers suffered at some stage from the failing still identified at the Kannada daily *Prajavani* in 1993. It was, its proprietor said, "probably incomprehensible to the ordinary man

⁷⁸ Interview, K. Kumaran, Managing Director, *Dinakaran*, Chennai, 18 January 1999. He is the son of Adithanar's only daughter.

⁷⁹ M. Chidanandamurthy, "Kannada", paper presented to the Seminar on Modernization of Indian Languages in News Media, Osmania University, Hyderabad, 1-3 February 1978. I am grateful to my colleague David Bradley for alerting me to this material.

⁸⁰ Melvin L. DeFleur and Sandra Ball-Rokeach, *Theories of Mass Communication*, 3rd edn (New York: Longman, 1975), p. 21.

⁸¹ Engel, *Tickle the Public*, pp. 25, 61.

[with] highly Sanskritised, very difficult language [and] long sentences".⁸² Successful newspapers, however, worked to make their language colloquial and easy to understand. Parulekar at *Sakal* was notorious for his "penchant for simple language",⁸³ but in times when Indian-language newspapers did not aim to widen their readership dramatically, *Sakal* was unusual. However, once the drive for readers began, newspapers were unwise to persist with classical vocabulary and elaborate grammar. In Telugu, *Eenadu* aimed to "mould ... the language in the easiest way" and make the newspaper "very simple, very easy to understand".⁸⁴ Bengali newspapers, especially *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, were credited with having "almost completely transformed the Bengali language as it is written and read". They had introduced language that was "simple, staccato, almost colloquial".⁸⁵

In the past, old elites bent on "improvement" often chose to write their newspapers in ornate language and Sanskritic or classical styles – what they regarded as "fine prose". One of their projects – in Hindi, at least – involved the creation of elaborate Sanskrit terms to replace English words.⁸⁶ Confronted by the colloquial language of a *Punjab Kesari*, *Dina Thanthi*, *Eenadu* or *Sakal*, old elites felt "discomfort and exasperation" at language "which upset the hierarchy of authority and genres".⁸⁷ The old-style newspapers also tended to rely on national and international stories translated from English, which were "consequently devoid of personality, style and reader interest".⁸⁸ The language was often ponderous and sometimes simply misleading. Circulation-building newspapers, on the other hand, developed styles that ordinary people could easily read, and wrote about affairs that ordinary people readily related to. It is common to hear *Dina Thanthi* and newspapers like it dismissed as "a paper for rickshaw drivers". People associated with *Thanthi* agreed that cinema, politics and crime were for a long time its staple.⁸⁹ But is the fact that rickshaw drivers read a newspaper a

⁸² Interview, K.N. Harikumar, 20 April 1993.

⁸³ *Independent*, 29 December 1990 (clipping files in the library at *Eenadu*, Hyderabad).

⁸⁴ Interviews, Ramesh Babu, Managing Director, Newstoday, Hyderabad, 27 February 1993; and S. Prakasa Rao, Director, Press Institute of India, New Delhi, 9 January 1987. A Telugu himself, the late Mr Prakasa Rao had retired as news editor of the *Statesman*.

⁸⁵ *Onlooker*, 16-31 August 1981, p. 14.

⁸⁶ A celebrated example was *agnirathchalnuchalananniyantranpattika* for "railway signal". King, *One Language*, p. 174.

⁸⁷ Francesca Orsini, "What Did They Mean by 'Public'? Language, Literature and the Politics of Nationalism", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13 February 1999, p. 410.

⁸⁸ J.P. Chaturvedi, *The Indian Press at the Crossroads: Saga of Fifty Years* (New Delhi: Media Research Associates, 1992), p. 40.

⁸⁹ *Business Line*, 23 October 1998, p. 6. Interview, K. Kumaran, Chennai, 18 January 1999.

vice or a virtue? S.P. Adithanar, the founder of *Dina Thanthi*, made his ambition clear to his employees: to run a newspaper "that would be useful to the common people".⁹⁰

Old elites lamented what in the United States was called "dumbing down" – simplifying and trivializing newspapers to the point where they no longer pretended to inform or improve.⁹¹ But the comparison with US newspapers is imperfect. In the United States, the criticism usually focused on content alone. In India critics deplored both the content and language of circulation-building newspapers.

Indeed some editors and readers argued that languages were being fatally debased. Pandering to the "semi-literate", they said, destroyed people's potential ever to function effectively in their mother tongue. Generations were emerging who, though literate in theory, were unable to appreciate sophisticated written material, whether in English, Hindi or their own language. M.T. Vasudevan Nair, writer and editor of the "serious" and faltering Malayalam *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, observed that young people "say 'I can't understand ... I have studied only up to the Fifth Standard [about the fifth year of schooling]. I cannot read *Mathrubhumi* [Weekly]'" Vasudevan Nair echoed views from Maharashtra to West Bengal:

Readers for serious publications have dwindled ... The younger generation ... are not reading Malayalam ... [We are] the only country where our own language is taught as a second language.⁹²

The evidence, however, suggested that younger people *were* reading Malayalam, but not Vasudevan Nair's preferred Malayalam. In 1993 the two popular Malayalam weeklies, *Manorama Weekly* and *Mangalam*, sold 1.3 million and 830,000 copies a week respectively (2.13 million copies combined) in a state with a population of about 30 million people. *Mathrubhumi Weekly* sold 61,000 copies, down from 102,000 five years before.⁹³ In 1998, despite the spread of television, the two popular weeklies combined still sold 1.9 million copies a week; *Mathrubhumi Weekly* had fallen to 55,000.⁹⁴

Newspapers began to standardize language by producing style guides and manuals for reporters and sub-editors. When sold to the public,

⁹⁰ Interview, T.K. Rajagopal, Chief Executive Officer, Sovereign Media Marketing Pvt Ltd, Chennai, 20 January 1999. Rajagopal worked with Adithanar from the 1960s. Sovereign Marketing is *Dina Thanthi's* advertising and promotional wing.

⁹¹ *Columbia Journalism Review*, July-August 1997, pp. 18-19 for a discussion of "dumbing down" in American and British newspapers; and Kurtz, *Media Circus*, p. 341.

⁹² Interview, M.T. Vasudevan Nair, Editor, *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, Calicut, 3 April 1993.

⁹³ *ABC January-June 1993*; *January-June 1988*.

⁹⁴ *ABC January-June 1998*.

such guides further embedded a particular version of the language. As early as 1959, *Malayala Manorama* produced a Malayalam household reference book, *Manorama Yearbook*, which assumed a place in Kerala similar to that of *Pears' Cyclopaedia* or *Whitaker's Almanac* in twentieth-century Britain or the almanac in nineteenth-century France.⁹⁵ Adithanar published a style guide for *Dina Thanthi* in 1971.⁹⁶ *Eenadu* created a style guide and a dictionary of terms and standard spelling, which sold widely.⁹⁷ In Bengali *Ananda Bazar Patrika* produced a style guide, which its editor described as a cross between the *Chicago Manual of Style* and the standards of Reuters and the *Economist*. Published in 1991, it quickly sold 30,000 copies and was believed to have inspired “five or six illegal editions in Bangladesh”.⁹⁸ Even in Kannada an editor, then at *Prajavani*, wrote a “guide to Kannada language” in 1988, which he described as being like Strunk and White’s *Elements of Style*.⁹⁹

The requirements of a large newspaper made such standardization desirable. But in homogenizing languages – ruling out some local variations and ruling others in – newspapers were doing more than simply prosecuting their businesses efficiently. They were changing the way people in localities wrote, spoke and perhaps even behaved. Because growing newspapers preferred readily understood, simple language, their innovations represented a challenge to older, narrower elites who once monopolized information and determined taste. “A paper for rickshaw drivers” may trouble some people with its menace of rabble-rousing populism yet thrill others with its promise of equality and fraternity.

Dumbing Down or Raising Hell?

As the number of literate people grew from 100 million to 234 million in the twenty years to 1981 and to 352 million by 1991,¹⁰⁰ the localizing

⁹⁵ *Manorama Year Book*, 1961 (Kottayam: Manorama Publishing House, 1961), p. v, for a brief history. Though the outer cover is printed in English, the 700 pages of text are all in Malayalam – except a number of the advertisements. The 1961 edition, of which I have a copy, is the third. An English version was begun in 1965. For France see Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, p. 461.

⁹⁶ S.P. Adithanar, *A Handbook for Journalists* [in Tamil], 4th edition (Chennai: Ravi Muthu, 1996; 1st published 1971). I was given a copy at *Dina Thanthi* on 20 January 1999.

⁹⁷ *Eenadu Bhasha Swaroopam* [the style guide] (Hyderabad: Ushodaya Publications, 1981), 79 pp. *Eenadu Vyavahaara Koosam* (a dictionary of English-to-Telugu translation with standardized transliteration) (Hyderabad: Ushodaya Publications, 1990), 231 pp. Interview, Dr Boodaraju Radhakrishna, Principal, Eenadu School of Journalism, Hyderabad, 4 March 1993.

⁹⁸ Interview, Aveek Sarkar, editor and owner, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta, 4 January 1994.

⁹⁹ Interview, Y.N. Krishna Murthy, Editor, *Kannada Prabha*, Bangalore, 19 April 1993.

¹⁰⁰ See Table 1.3.

of production, content and language opened up widening circles of people to the influence of the daily newspaper. Some proprietors and editors sensed a vast, waiting market. In 1967 T. J. S. George argued for district correspondents and local editions and cited *Sakal* and *Malayala Manorama* as examples of what improved local coverage could achieve. Such coverage, he wrote, was essential because it was "inevitably promotional [and] ... linked to the balance sheet".¹⁰¹ The proprietors of *Nai Duniya*, a Hindi daily in Indore, predicted in 1971 "an era of readership explosion" in the rural areas.¹⁰² But, as we have seen, technology and incentives had to coincide to trigger the drive to localize.

Mrs Gandhi's heavy-handed media managers, desperate to save her fortunes at the end of the "emergency", also understood the potential power of the local. A meeting in January 1977 instructed government television and radio officials to "localise by naming/fully identifying ... names of people/places known or nearby and from the same profession as that of listeners/viewers" because this "will evoke both interest and credibility".¹⁰³ For Mrs Gandhi and her henchmen in 1977 it was too late; but all financially successful Indian-language newspapers heeded this message over the next twenty years.

To localize became an economic necessity with unpredictable political outcomes. Proprietors needed readers to get ads and ads to make profits. Localizing did not necessarily mean "dumbing down". It could also mean "old-fashioned hell-raising", in the words of American newspaper critic Howard Kurtz. In India such "hell-raising" was more often new-fangled than old-fashioned. In rural India, the arrival of newspapers and journalists changed social and political equations. In 1986 in Orissa, the Oriya daily *Prajatantra* had begun to experiment with greater coverage of local news. In response to a rumour about the sale of small girls for Rs 20, it sent a photographer and reporter to remote Kalahandi district, one of the least developed districts in a less-developed state. According to the newspaper's version – compare it with *Malayala Manorama's* legend about the "Pulpalli raid" of 1968 – the reporter and photographer walked 22 km. to reach the village where one such child lived. Their stories and pictures began a campaign that lasted six months, drew reporters from all over India and overseas and "force[d]

¹⁰¹ T.J.S. George, *The Provincial Press in India* (New Delhi: Press Institute of India, 1967), p. 70.

¹⁰² *Problems of Small Newspapers*: p. 42.

¹⁰³ *White Paper on Misuse of Mass Media during the Internal Emergency (August 1977)* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1977), Appendix 11, p. 29.

two prime ministers to visit the place".¹⁰⁴ It also brought, the chairman of the newspaper concluded, a substantial rise in circulation.¹⁰⁵

The newspaper revolution put a new, physical presence in many towns: the newspaper office or the newspaper correspondent. "I'll go to the newspapers!" has been a standard cry of the outraged citizen in the industrial world for generations. In India until the 1980s most outraged citizens, even if they knew where to go, would have had a long journey to get there. Now, in towns like Rajahmundry, Satna and Cannanore, citizens, outraged or otherwise, saw the newspaper office every day as they went about their business. Those offices existed because proprietors knew that they had to produce a breakfast newspaper, fresh with last night's news, if potential readers were to become regular buyers. That newspaper had to be filled with stories close to the lives of readers and written in language they liked and understood. The growth of newspapers expanded an occupational category: "journalist" – people who wanted to write, earn an income and be important. Small-town correspondents went looking for stories. Outraged citizens might find that they didn't have to go to the newspapers; the newspapers came to them. "Information", once a near-monopoly of the well-connected, became indiscriminately available. Newspapers brought new habits of behaviour – read every morning before leaving home, then left in the house for wives and children, or analyzed in the tea-shop or the workplace through the day. Newspapers propagated capitalism by their constant need to create advertisers and advertising – real estate sections, birth, marriage and death notices, lamentations on the deaths of stud bulls. Perhaps too they brought new habits of thought: those regular, authoritative columns of type, reporting the weather around India, stockmarket prices in Mumbai, football matches in Calcutta, politicians' misbehaviour in the state capital, border clashes in Kashmir. Was this not "lifting horizons", even if the items a reader first turned to were the reports of local crime and punishment? Localized newspapers brought metaphorical motorbikes to people who previously had been only pedestrians.

¹⁰⁴ P. Sainath, *Everybody Loves a Good Drought* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1996), p. 436. Following up the story nearly ten years later, Sainath discovered it was not as straightforward as it was portrayed in the English-language press in the 1980s (pp. 325–38).

¹⁰⁵ Interview, Bhartruhari Mahtab, Editor, Chairman and Managing Director, *Prajatantra*, Cuttack, 31 December 1993. *Prajatantra*'s circulation appears to have risen from 57,000 copies in 1984 to 77,000 at the end of 1986. *PAYB*, 1987, p. 64c.

OWNING

By international standards a lot of people own Indian-language newspapers. These owners are linchpins of the Indian state because they connect their regions to "India" and "India" to their regions. They perform this role often unconsciously. Their calculated goals are influence and profit, not necessarily "national integration". The linchpin role of their newspapers, however, lies within the nature of the daily newspaper itself, not in the preoccupations of proprietors or the way specific newspapers are run.

From the 1980s – earlier in some regions of south India – proprietors of Indian-language newspapers began to enjoy a growing deference from politicians and officials. Just as advertisers slowly came to believe that Indian-language newspapers reached people with real purchasing power, politicians began to realize that Indian-language newspapers now influenced very large numbers of voters. From the 1977 national elections, the electorate seemed less and less amenable to the old ways of lining up voters through local bigwigs and landowners. These more autonomous and unpredictable voters were also more likely to be literate and to see newspapers. And newspapers were more interested than ever before in the lives of such people. The people who owned such newspapers therefore assumed a new importance.

Proprietors had to become capitalists to survive. Some were already capitalists. Others were traders with printing presses who transformed their businesses into capitalist enterprises. Still others failed, and their newspapers folded. Like coral in a reef, newspapers grew and died in a process inseparable from the creation of a "public sphere" in the classic liberal sense. Individual proprietors sometimes brought to their newspapers a crusader's zeal for a particular cause or a diehard's loathing for a rival. Such predilections were part of the creation and expansion of a "public sphere", wherein the best – though imperfect – guarantee of an open press lies in having a diversity of moderately successful proprietors who don't much like each other.

Diversity

To argue that ownership of Indian-language newspapers is relatively diverse seems at first controversial. From the 1950s critics constantly argued that Indian newspapers were largely controlled by "monopoly capitalists". In 1954 the First Press Commission contended that the "power of the holder of a monopoly to influence his public in any way he chooses should be regulated and restrained."¹ Eleven years later the Inquiry Committee on Small Newspapers urged "maintaining [the] outcry against the growth of newspaper chains".² In 1973 the Indian Federation of Working Journalists published a small book entitled *India's Monopoly Press: a Mirror of Distortion*, which decried "the vested interests of the monopoly houses which own the biggest newspapers with the biggest circulations".³ In the early 1980s the veteran journalist Pran Chopra argued that concentration of ownership was growing. And a report written for the Second Press Commission in 1982 advocated "public takeover of the top eight newspaper establishments" because it was essential "to delink the press from the monopoly Houses".⁴

The latter report focused on the English language, which "from the viewpoint of national policies", it concluded, was "the most important language press".⁵ In a sense, this was true. English-language newspapers, as we know, garnered most of the advertising revenue, and influenced most politicians and bureaucrats, until well into the 1980s. Nevertheless, as we have seen, conditions were changing even as these words were written.

And if one looked at newspapers in all languages, ownership was fairly widely dispersed, especially compared to countries like Australia, Canada or the United States. In the United States in 1976, the chief executive of the leading newspaper chain, Gannett, was able to boast to shareholders that "no Gannett newspaper has any direct competition ... in any community in which we publish."⁶ In India in the 1990s no chain could make such a claim. The share of the top five chains in the total circulation of daily newspapers hovered around 30 per cent for

¹ *Press Commission, 1954*, vol. 1, p. 311.

² *Report...Small Newspapers*, p. 13.

³ Sumanta Banerjee, *India's Monopoly Press* (New Delhi: IWFJ Publication, 1973), p. 88.

⁴ Pran Chopra in *EPW*, 4 October 1980, p. 1655. S. K. Goyal and Chalapathi Rao, *Ownership and Control Structure of the Indian Press*, report prepared for the Second Press Commission, 1981, pp. iii, 124.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁶ Al Neuharth quoted in Bagdikian, *Media Monopoly*, p. 75. For the effect of Gannett ownership, Columbia Journalism Review, November-December 1997, pp. 42-Grant

forty years, as Table 5.1, derived from different inquiries at different times, indicates. Moreover, the circulation increases of the 1980s increased the economic and political influence of regional proprietors. This in turn supported the diffused control of the industry. Indian newspaper industries were still open enough that even *Eenadu*, with more than 70 per cent of Telugu daily circulations by the early 1990s, had an effective rival launched against it in 1996.

Table 5.1. SHARE OF DAILY CIRCULATIONS OF
THE FIVE LEADING CHAINS, 1953-93

	1953	1973	1979	1993
% share in daily circs. of top 5 chains	31	29	31	33

Sources: *Press Commission, 1954*, vol. 1, p. 309 for 1953. *Report ... Fact-Finding*, p. 38 for 1973. Goyal and Rao, *Ownership*, p. 15 for 1979. I have calculated 1993 from *ABC January-June 1993*.

The statistics of the two bodies that regularly monitored Indian newspapers confirmed this picture of relatively diffused ownership. The Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC), the association of publishers, advertising agencies and advertisers established in 1948, aimed to provide reliable circulation figures for advertisers and advertising agencies. The Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) was the government monitor set up in 1957 to oversee the press. The Registrar's office acquired importance when its "statistics and other information" were "utilised for the purpose of allocation of newsprint" after India's foreign-exchange shortages began in the late 1950s.⁷ The ABC represented substantial fee-paying organizations who required the legitimacy that verified circulations brought. The Registrar, on the other hand, was a government functionary, resented by many in the newspaper industry as a costly nuisance to be placated like a rich aunt.⁸

The early preoccupation of Indian governments and politicians with "monopoly house" control of newspapers was reflected in the annual reports of the Registrar. At the start in 1956, "many publishers ... did not disclose effective common ownership," the Registrar noted. But "on the basis of further information collected during 1957 ... a large number of groups and multiple units came to notice".⁹ *Press in India*, as the Registrar's reports came to be called, each year contained a chapter compiling statistics on ownership. Changing little over forty

⁷ *PII*, 1958, p. vi.

⁸ Robin Jeffrey, "Monitoring Newspapers and Understanding the State: India, 1948-93", *Asian Survey*, vol. 34, no. 9 (September 1994), pp. 748-63.

⁹ *PII*, 1958, p. 43.

years, the chapter listed owners who published more than one title. 135 in 1958 and 142 in 1995.¹⁰

Table 5.2. CONCENTRATION OF OWNERSHIP OF DAILY NEWSPAPERS, Mid-1990s

Category	RNI, 1994 and 1995	ABC, 1995
1. Number of daily newspapers	1,056*	165
2. Total circulation in millions	35.5*	16.5
3. Daily circulation of largest 5 companies in millions	5.5 (17%)	5.5 (33%)
4. Daily circulation of largest 10 companies in millions	8.3 (27%)	8.8 (50%)
5. Daily circulation of largest 20 companies in millions	12.4 (39%)	11.7 (71%)

Sources: PII, 1995, pp. 73-4. PII, 1996, p. 27. ABC January-June 1995 and ABC January-June 1996. INS Press Handbook, 1992 (New Delhi: Indian Newspaper Society, n.d. [1993]).

* 1995 figures

In 1995 the Audit Bureau of Circulations, the more trusted monitor of the major newspapers, had 165 daily newspapers as members, whose combined circulations came to 16.5 million copies a day.¹¹ The Registrar in 1995 counted 4,236 dailies, though only 1,056 filed returns with his office. The combined circulation of the 1,056 was 35.5 million copies a day¹² (see Table 5.2).

Examination of the top twenty-one daily newspapers (ABC members) illustrated the relative diffusion of ownership. They represented the most powerful print interests in India, but they did not dominate the industry totally. If we accept the Registrar's 1995 figures of 35.5 million newspapers sold each day, the 16.5 million dailies sold by all members of the Audit Bureau was less than 50 per cent (see Table 5.2). Even among Audit Bureau members, the top five or 10 members were far from having a stranglehold on the industry. Indeed, in 1995 the top ten newspapers in the Audit Bureau controlled only about half of Audit Bureau daily circulations in all languages, including English. The combined circulation of the top ten was about 8.8 million copies.¹³

¹⁰ PII, 1958, p. 69. PII, 1996, p. 53.

¹¹ ABC January-June 1995, pp. 1-6.

¹² PII, 1996, pp. 8, 27.

¹³ ABC January-June 1995, pp. 1-6. Based on daily circulations, the top ten newspaper groups were the Times of India, Indian Express, Hindustan Times, Malayala Manorama, Gujarat Samachar, Ananda Bazar Patrika, Punjab Kesari, Eenadu, Mathrubhumi and The Hindu.

Table 5.3. MEMBERS CONTROLLING MORE THAN 70 PER CENT OF ABC DAILY CIRCULATION, 1993

Legal entity	Daily circ. (%)	Language	Owners	Acquired (or founded)
1. Bennett Coleman & Co. Ltd (<i>Times of India</i> etc.)	9.8	E G H Mar	Jain family	1955-87 (1838)
2. Indian Express Newspapers (Bombay) Pvt Ltd	9.6	E G H K Mar Tm Tl	Goenka family – divided 1998 into two branches*	1940
3. Malayala Manorama Co. Ltd	4.7	Mal	Varghese Mappillai family (Kandathil)	1889
4. Hind Samachar Ltd (Punjab Kesari)	4.4	H P U	Chopra family	1948
5. Hindustan Times Ltd	4.2	E H	Birla family	1927 (1924)
6. Ananda Bazar Patrika Ltd	4.0	B E	Sarkar family	1922
7. Lok Prakashan Ltd (<i>Gujarat Samachar</i>)	3.7	G	Shreyans Shah family	1952 (1932)
8. Kasturi & Sons Ltd (<i>The Hindu</i>)	3.2	E	Kasturi family	1878
9. Aaj Prakashan Ltd (<i>Aaj</i>)	3.1	H	S. V. Gupta	1920
10. Sandesh Ltd (<i>Sandesh</i>)	3.1	G	Falgunbhai Patel	1958 (1923)
11. Mathrubhumi Printing and Publishing Co. Ltd (<i>Mathrubhumi</i>)	3.0	Mal	Shares – M. P. Veerendrakumar acquires major interest 1998	1923
12. Ushodaya Publications (<i>Eenadu</i>)	2.7	E Tl	Ramaji Rao	1974
13. Jagran Prakashan Ltd	2.6	H	Gupta family	1947
14. Thanthi Trust	2.2	Tm	B. S. Adityan in the form of a trust	1942
15. The Printers (Mysore) Ltd (<i>Deccan Herald, Prujavani</i>)	2.0	E K	K. N. Hari Kumar	1948
16. Rajasthan Patrika Ltd	2.0	E H	Kothari family	1956
17. Amar Ujala Prakashan	1.8	H	Agarwal & Maheshwari families	1948
18. Sakal Papers Ltd	1.6	Mar	Pawar family	1986 (1932)
19. Dinamalar	1.6	Tm	Family of late T. V. Ramasubbaiyer as a partnership	1951
20. Kumar Publications Trust (<i>Dinakaran</i>)	1.5	Tm	Family of late K.P. Kandasamy, son-in- law of S.P. Adithanar, as a partnership	1977
21. Bartaman Printers & Publishers Pvt Ltd	1.4	B	Arun Sinha	1984
Total	71.3			

Abbreviations: B=Bengali; E=English; G=Gujarati; H=Hindi; K=Kannada; Mal=Malayalam; Mar=Marathi; P=Punjabi; Tm=Tamil; Tl=Telugu; U=Urdu

Notes: Column 2 states the percentage share of the total circulation of daily newspapers audited by the ABC in 1993 – 14.9 million copies.

Unless otherwise indicated, the newspapers are held as private companies or as "closely held" public companies – i.e. a limited number of shareholders, usually family members, and not listed on the stock exchange.

* In 1997 the heirs of Ramnath Goenka made a division between north and south to create separate operations. The northern segment, under Vivek (Khaitan) Goenka, Goenka's grandson through a daughter, published as the *Indian Express*. Khaitan had been "adopted" by Ramnath Goenka just before his death. The southern segment went to the family branch of Manoj Santhalia, a grandson through another daughter. Its dailies began publishing as the *New*

Indian Express in 1999. Saroj Goenka, widow of Ramnath Goenka's only son, is said to have received much of the southern real estate assets in this settlement.¹⁴

Sources: *ABC January-June 1993*. *INS Press Handbook, 1992* (New Delhi: Indian Newspaper Society, n.d. [1993]).

The sense that Indian newspapers were in peril from monopoly ownership had a variety of origins. Perhaps the most important stemmed from the preoccupation with English-language newspapers which eroded only in the 1980s. If one looked only at the English-language press, concentration of ownership was more noticeable. Two chains – Bennett Coleman and Co. Ltd (BCCL), publishers of the *Times of India*, and Indian Express newspapers – controlled close to 20 per cent of daily circulations in all languages in the 1990s (see Table 5.3).

Neither Bennett Coleman, nor the Indian Express, owed its origins or strength to Indian languages. Both, however, published Indian-language dailies, and their presence in various parts of the country affected the development of other newspapers. Bennett Coleman in the 1990s was the biggest and most profitable chain in India. Begun “by the leading [European] merchants of Bombay” as the *Bombay Times* in 1838, the *Times of India* acquired its present name in 1861.¹⁵ The identity and significance of Bennett and Coleman disappeared in the nineteenth century. In 1945, the sale of the company by its European owners to the shady capitalist Ramakrishna Dalmia (1893-1978) further excited the suspicions of Indian nationalists about “monopoly houses”,¹⁶ as the country’s best-known English-language newspaper passed from unsympathetic Europeans to a very Indian but nonetheless notorious tycoon.

In the lore of Indian newspapers, stories about Dalmia abound. “Semi-literate and with a limited mental horizon”, he nevertheless delighted in having his “lengthy and ludicrous statements, publicizing his half-baked ideas” on the front page of his newspapers.¹⁷ He had a number of wives, held editorial meetings while having his daily massage, which left him smelling “like ... a skunk”, and “measured human progress in terms of the status society accorded – and the column inches his flagship paper provided – to the cow.”¹⁸ Arrested in 1955 and eventually

¹⁴ Interview, T.N.C. Veeraraghavan, Director (Corporate Planning and Systems), Express Publications (Madurai) Ltd, Chennai, 19 January 1999.

¹⁵ *India Year Book, 1930* (Bombay: Bennett, Coleman and Co. Ltd, 1930), p. 664.

¹⁶ *Times of India*, 27 September 1978, pp. 1, 4, for Dalmia’s obituary.

¹⁷ Sahni, *Truth about the Indian Press*, pp. 194-214. George, *Pothan Joseph’s India*, p. 207. D. R. Mankekar, *Sheer Anecdote: Leaves from a Reporter’s Diary* (New Delhi: Allied, 1983), pp. 170-83.

¹⁸ Mankekar, *Anecdote*, pp. 172-5.

¹⁹ Sahni, *Truth about the Indian Press*, p. 199. George, *Pothan Joseph’s India*, p. 196. Mankekar, *Anecdote*, p. 197.

imprisoned for misappropriating funds held by one of his insurance companies, he had to dispose of Bennett Coleman to his son-in-law Shanti Prasad Jain to pay fines to the government.²⁰ Dalmia illustrated the passions – for esteem, influence and profit – that lead people to run newspapers; but such passions must be reined in if a newspaper is to succeed.

One might argue that the comparatively diverse ownership of Indian-language newspapers was simply a stage which would pass as big newspapers devoured smaller ones. Such was the twentieth-century experience in Australia, Britain, Canada and the United States. The decline of family-owned newspapers in industrialized countries is well-documented. Newspapers became

large-scale commercial ventures which required relatively large quantities of capital to initiate and sustain in the face of increasingly intense competition. Hence the traditional proprietor-publisher, who owned one or two newspapers as a family concern, increasingly gave way to the development of large-scale multi-newspaper and multi-media organizations.²¹

Similar processes had no doubt begun in India by the 1990s.

In India, however, the process was more complex. Diversity of ownership stemmed in part from the diversity of languages in which the Indian newspaper business was carried on. However easy it may appear to transplant newspaper techniques and set up successful newspapers regardless of language, in practice a business that so depended on language and local knowledge insulated itself against outsiders. Having to work in another tongue, script and culture threw up barriers. Even in the West with a shared Roman alphabet, few proprietors found it rewarding to become major competitors in more than one language. Bagdikian explained conditions in the United States:

Usually started as a local operation, expressing the viewpoint of a man who owned a small press, a newspaper tends to be owned by a private family or a small, closely held corporation ...

... on the whole absentee owners are less sensitive to local nuances.²²

In India, too, it proved difficult to run an outstandingly successful newspaper in more than one language area. In this, there was reason for cheer, because the most practical guarantee of a free press has been a strong field of competing proprietors.

This diversity of owners helped in the spreading and localizing of newspapers from the late 1970s. As printing technology became easier

²⁰ Mankekar, *Anecdoteage*, p. 210.

²¹ John B. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture* (Stanford University Press, 1990). p. 178.

²² Bagdikian, *Information Machines*, pp. 116-17.

and cheaper, it became possible for the owners of smaller newspapers to expand. One of the most remarkable and self-reliant of these proprietors explained that the

1980s is the decade in which this technical revolution took place in our newspaper industry. At that time I had money enough to buy modern machinery, and with [an] offset [press] – even with the first offset machine – printing will be as good as that of *Times of India*, because ... attention to printing [is] more important than the price you pay for the machine ... In the old days, [the] best machinery – you get [the] best result. Not so now.²³

At least in this initial stage, smaller proprietors, who often were closer to small-town and rural readers, or to pools of untapped urban readers, were able to grow. Compared to a country like Australia, in which two-thirds of big-city daily circulation in the 1990s was controlled by Rupert Murdoch's newspapers, the Indian-language newspaper industry was remarkably open.²⁴

Traders to capitalists

Indian-language newspapers are family-controlled and not listed on the stock market. Of the twenty-one newspapers that controlled 70 per cent of ABC daily circulation in the 1990s, only one – *Mathrubhumi*, the Malayalam daily of Kerala – was a public company whose shareholders were mostly unrelated. But even *Mathrubhumi*'s shares were held by a small clique. When one or two members broke what was a kind of "family solidarity" and sold shares to Bennett Coleman in 1988, the resulting dispute quickly reached the courts. It was resolved only in 1998 with Bennett Coleman selling their disputed shares to one of the original shareholders, M. P. Veerendrakumar.²⁵

The *Mathrubhumi* example illustrated both the dynamics of Indian newspaper ownership and the defences that language regions could throw up to repel outsiders. The Bennett Coleman share-purchase was portrayed as an affront to Kerala's dignity and independence. Newspapers could become symbols of "regional honour". *Eenadu* played a similar role

²³ Interview, Nilakantha Khadilkar, Editor and Owner, *Navakal*, Mumbai, 30 April 1993.

²⁴ Ian Ward, *Politics of the Media* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1995), p. 126. John Henningham, "The Press" in Stuart Cunningham and Graeme Turner (eds), *The Media in Australia* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993), pp. 64-5. Australia went from twenty-one companies running twenty-six big-city dailies in the 1920s to eight newspapers owned by four companies in the 1990s.

²⁵ Robin Jeffrey, "Malayalam: 'The Day-to-Day Social Life of the People ...'," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 4-11 January 1997, p. 19. Interview, M.D. Nalapat, Corresponding Editor, *Times of India*, New Delhi, 13 February 1999. It was the sale of Nalapat's family shareholding to Bennett Coleman in 1988 that triggered the dispute.

in the founding of the Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh in 1982, as we shall see.

The origins of newspapers explained aspects of their ownership and capacity to survive. Eleven of the family-owned newspapers were founded during the freedom struggle against the British or within a year of independence. The owning family created its newspaper partly to further a cause and gain influence; large profits were rarely the principal motivation. Once independence was achieved, however, the newspaper became a financial asset – perhaps a family's major asset. It was possible to make a profit from an Indian-language newspaper, but such a newspaper could be sold only with difficulty. Some families were almost trapped into the newspaper business.

The Indian Express empire of Ramnath Goenka (1902-91) was the grandest version of newspapers with some link to the "freedom struggle". When he died in 1991, his newspapers were published in cities and towns in every region of India except Calcutta and the east. Goenka was notorious for his penny-pinching and sacking of editors, and his employees were legendary for being "disgruntled, underpaid and woefully below strength".²⁶ A Marwari, born in Bihar, he started his empire in Madras with the *Indian Express* and *Dinamani* in the 1930s, lived at times in Calcutta and built his base in Mumbai. Like many north Indian proprietors, he came from the commercial, clerical "forward" castes, and though he began as a Congress-oriented nationalist, his heart moved towards the Hindu-revivalist political parties from the late 1960s. He was elected to the Lok Sabha as a Jana Sangh-backed independent from a seat in Madhya Pradesh in 1971, and his newspapers sparred with Mrs Gandhi throughout the "emergency". His only son, who predeceased him in 1979, married a daughter of the Jain family, owners of Bennett Coleman and the *Times of India*.

Goenka's origins and experience with Indian-language newspapers illustrated widely shared aspects of newspaper proprietorship. All of the eight large chains that controlled Hindi newspapers (see Table 5.3) were owned by similar, non-Brahmin but commercial-caste families. The owners of the Marathi, Gujarati and Bengali newspapers in Table 5.3 came from similar backgrounds.

In south India the social origins of proprietorial families were slightly more varied. The Kandathil family of *Malayala Manorama* was Syrian Christian. (Some scholars of Kerala would argue that Syrian Christians performed very similar roles to the commercial castes of north India). The Kasturi family of the *Hindu* were Brahmins, but they published

²⁶ Mankekar, *Anecdote*, p. 285. *SW*, 12 October 1991, p. 4. There is uncertainty about his birthdate. The *SW* says 11 May 1902; the *Hindustan Times*, 6 October 1991, p. 12, gives 18 April 1904.

only English-language publications. (Some north Indian proprietors of Hindi newspapers would say that the English-language press always behaved Brahminically.) *Dinamalar* was owned by a Brahmin family. The founder, T.V. Ramasubbaiyer (1908-84), began the paper in Trivandrum in the old Travancore-Cochin state in 1951 to press the case for merging the southern Tamil districts around Kanyakumari with Tamil-speaking Madras state where the family owned salt manufacturing operations. After integration with Madras in 1956, Ramasubbaiyer moved the paper to Tirunelveli and later opened editions in Tiruchchirapalli (1966) and Madras (1979).²⁷

The most influential caste in the Tamil press, however, were Nadars – non-Brahmins held to be at the lower end of the old caste ladder.²⁸ S.P. Adithanar of *Dina Thanthi* was a Nadar, and his descendants were everywhere in Tamil newspapers in the 1990s. His estranged son-in-law started *Dinakaran* in 1977 to support the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). Adithanar, on the other hand, backed M.G. Ramachandran and the All-India Anna DMK (AIADMK). In the 1990s, *Dina Thanthi* continued as a legal trust, but very much in the control of Adithanar's son, Sivanthi Adithyan, whose own son ran an evening daily, *Maalai Malar*. Adithanar's grandson now controlled *Dinakaran*, while another of Adithanar's sons ran the evening and morning dailies, *Maalai Murasu* and *Kadiravan*.²⁹

In the Telugu and Kannada areas of the south, the social origins of other prominent proprietors were somewhat similar. Ramoji Rao of *Eenadu* was a Kamma, one of the great "middle caste" categories of the Telugu area, more often associated with agriculture than literary or commercial pursuits. Hari Kumar of *Prajavani*, the Kannada daily, and the *Deccan Herald* in Bangalore, was an Idiga, a *jati* in the past associated with toddy-tapping. His family grew wealthy in the liquor trade in the 1930s and 1940s.³⁰ And the Malayalam daily, *Mathrubhumi*, though closer to being a genuine public company, had long been thought of, because of its founder-editor K.P. Kesava Menon and his associates, as a newspaper of Nairs, the high-status, landed, bureaucratic caste group of old Kerala.

²⁷ Interview, R. Krishnamurthy, Editor, *Dinamalar*, Chennai, 19 January 1999. Krishnamurthy is a son of the founder. *Dinamalar* is held as a legal partnership, not as a company.

²⁸ See Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr, *The Nadars of Tamilnad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

²⁹ *Business Line*, 23 October 1998, p. 6. Interview, T.K. Rajagopal, D. Rajiah. R. Thiruvadi, *Dina Thanthi*, Chennai, 20 January 1999. Interview, K. Kumaran, *Dinakaran*, 18 January 1999.

³⁰ Robin Jeffrey, "Kannada: 'We Fake It There Is Competition' ", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22 March 1997, pp. 567-70.

The heavy preponderance of commercial families was not surprising. Except during the nationalist movement, when to run a newspaper could be seen as a duty, or occasionally in other times when conduct of a newspaper became a folly, newspapers were businesses. But they were special businesses – “a unique combination of power and money”, wrote M.J. Akbar, one of India’s most successful editors of the 1980s,³¹ which establishes “the pre-eminence of newspaper proprietorship over other brands of power”.³² Not only can newspapers make money; they can bring to their owners immense self-satisfaction, stemming from social recognition and respect. “An ego even larger than the editor’s is the owner[’s].”³³ Lunching in a restaurant with the Canadian newspaper proprietor Conrad Black, a writer noted that Black’s “enjoyment of the role of influential proprietor was highly evident. He relished the attention ...”³⁴ His relish could not have been very different from the feelings of Ashwini Kumar, resident editor of *Punjab Kesari* in New Delhi and a member of the owning family:

So [Prime Minister Narasimha Rao] rang me up. He said, “I read your editorial, Ashwini. How can you say [I’ve not achieved anything]? I have solved [the] Punjab problem. I have solved [the] Bodo problem ... I have pulled up the economy. You should write about this.”

I said, “Okay, next time I am going to come and see you, then I want to discuss all these things.”

And I spent two hours with him, and he was telling me everything. He said, “Ashwini, I want to tell you that I have done this, I have done th[at].”

He was trying to convince me!

This is [a] very important thing. Earlier, the politicians never used to do this sort of thing with Hindi editors.³⁵

As Ashwini Kumar’s remark indicated, newspapers had to be connected to power if status was to follow. Until the 1980s, Indian-language newspapers had special problems establishing that connection.

Of the top twenty-one companies in terms of daily circulations, only four published primarily in English: Bennett Coleman, the Indian Express, the Hindustan Times and the Hindu. The Hindu organization had never tried to publish in any language but English. And the other three had been able to sustain top-circulation status only in English. The closest any came to establishing a leading Indian-language newspaper was the lead that *Navbharat Times* (Bennett Coleman) held among Hindi dailies

³¹ M.J. Akbar, “How to Start a Newspaper and Succeed”, *Vidura*, vol. 29, no. 1 (March 1992), p. 20.

³² Nicholas Coleridge, *Paper Tigers* (London: Heinemann, 1993), p. 309.

³³ Akbar, “How to Start”, p. 20.

³⁴ Coleridge, *Paper Tigers*, p. 309.

³⁵ Interview, Ashwini Kumar, Resident Editor, *Punjab Kesari*, New Delhi, 6 May 1993.

until the mid-1980s. Similarly, the *Maharashtra Times* (Bennett Coleman) and *Loksatta* (Indian Express) have occasionally been the best-selling Marathi dailies. On the other hand, though the Indian Express published dailies in six languages besides English, none of them was the top-selling newspaper in its language.

Unless a proprietor could make his or her newspaper the only newspaper in town or region – in short, do what the Gannett chain boasted it had done in the United States and establish a monopoly – it was essential to be closely engaged with the language and culture of a place.³⁶ To do this in more than one language seemed immensely difficult. On the surface, to be sure, it may have seemed easy: hire the best editors in a language and let them do their job. In practice, however, the process did not work so smoothly. Part of the reason may be that the outsider-proprietor treated an Indian-language daily as the poor relation of the production centre. It got early deadlines, antiquated equipment, slower distribution methods and fewer, poorer paid staff. Advertising rates were far higher for the English-language stable-mate. In the past, the reason for running an Indian-language newspaper was often to garner a small profit from equipment, necessary for the English-language money-maker, that otherwise would lie idle.

In describing his motivations for starting *Eenadu* in 1974, Ramoji Rao captured a sense that a newspaper was more than simply business:

I am not chauvinistic. I believe that everybody in this world can go to anywhere in the globe.[...] But at the same time the newspaper media business ... is not business. Media is a profession, and more so ... where there are language complications ...

... [I had a high regard for] Mr Goenka [the founder of the Indian Express chain] for ... the part he ... played in building up the newspaper world in this country ... But at the same time I couldn't relish his idea of making it into a business – by starting a Telugu newspaper [*Andhra Prabha*, 1946], not knowing a word of Telugu. Supposing Mr Goenka knows Telugu, [then] he has every right to bring in a newspaper. His not being a Telugu man was my objection. His not knowing Telugu and running a Telugu newspaper is my objection.[...] I believe [a] newspaper is not business. [A] newspaper is essentially a profession and then [a] business.[...] So I thought: "How can a non-Telugu newspaper – [a] non-Telugu man running a newspaper – be number one? [It] is an insult to the Telugu intellect and somebody in Telugu must beat him ..." ³⁷

By the 1970s when he had this conversation with himself, Ramoji Rao was wealthy enough to start a newspaper. He began *Eenadu* less because he wanted to make money than because he *had* money.

³⁶ Bagdikian, *Media Monopoly*, p. 75.

³⁷ Interview, Ramoji Rao, Chairman, Ushodaya Enterprises Ltd, Hyderabad, 26 February 1993.

India's diversity of languages, federal structure and language policy helped to sustain proprietors of Indian-language newspapers. Of the twenty-five states, thirteen had one of India's official languages as their state language of education and administration.³⁸ Most of the remainder used Hindi. The newspapers that propelled these entrenched languages had guaranteed readerships in schools and offices, and as readerships grew, so did the importance of the proprietor who influenced readers. Such proprietors became leading members of regional elites, and once so established, they could make it difficult for others to encroach on their territory.

When Bennett Coleman tried to establish a Gujarati daily in Ahmedabad about 1991,³⁹ they "burned their fingers".⁴⁰ Part of the problem may have been the unwillingness of Bennett Coleman to accept losses. But there were cultural aspects as well. The two dominant Gujarati dailies, *Gujarat Samachar* and *Sandesh*, were brash and ugly broadsheets that scored poorly on scales of graphic design and sobriety. But that was what Gujaratis were accustomed to and apparently liked – just as north Indian Hindi-speakers liked the similarly rough style of *Punjab Kesari*. An owner of the leading Gujarati daily believed that the Bennett Coleman newspaper missed the key ingredient of success: "Gujarati journalism is a hands-on thing. You have to catch the spirit."⁴¹ A Gujarati journalist concurred: Bennett Coleman "didn't allow the freedom to their Gujarati editor".⁴² Reluctant to persevere with their more sober newspaper, Bennett Coleman made the further mistake of trying to translate English editorials into Gujarati each day, thus further distancing the newspaper from the idiosyncrasies of its audience. And rival Gujarati newspapers played rough: hawkers were intimidated and told not to handle Bennett Coleman's Gujarati daily; bundles of newspapers were "lost" on their way to their destinations.⁴³

An unprofitable Gujarati edition made no sense for Bennett Coleman, which had few incentives to compete in a cut-throat, loss-making, imperfectly understood market. It could take its investment elsewhere. A

³⁸ 1. Kerala – Malayalam; 2. Tamil Nadu – Tamil; 3. Karnataka – Kannada; 4. Andhra Pradesh – Telugu; 5. Orissa – Oriya; 6. West Bengal – Bengali; 7. Assam – Assamese; 8. Manipur – Manipuri; 9. Punjab – Punjabi; 10. Kashmir – Kashmiri; 11. Gujarat – Gujarati; 12. Maharashtra – Marathi; 13. Goa – Konkani.

³⁹ The PAYB lists the Gujarati "Times of India" only once – PAYB, 1992-3, p. 42c

⁴⁰ Interview, Sunil Rajshekhar, Deputy General Manager, *Times of India*, Bangalore, 20 April 1993.

⁴¹ Interview, Nirmam Shah, Executive Editor, *Gujarat Samachar*, Ahmedabad, 1 February 1999.

⁴² Interview, Kanti Bhatt, Consulting Editor, Shakti Publications, Mumbai, 25 April 1993.

⁴³ Interviews, Govind Talwalkar, Editor, *Maharashtra Times*, and Hasamukh Gandhi, Editor, *Samakaleen*, both in Mumbai, 27 April 1993.

Gujarati proprietor, on the other hand, might have persevered – pursuing honour, like Ramoji Rao, or attempting to salvage an investment. An insider would also have been loath to abandon the idiosyncrasies and genius of his or her own place by publishing editorials translated from English. A Gujarati would have found plenty to say in Gujarati about Gujarat and Gujarati views of the world. Outsiders, on the other hand, calculated that particular measures, such as translated editorials, made financial sense; but they forgot that a Mumbai-based, English-language editor's molehill may be a Gujarati mountain.

Cultural diversity may thus help to preserve diversity of ownership at least for a time. Though the major languages provided markets large enough to sustain probing, intensely local newspapers, they were not so valuable as to lead even Bennett Coleman to throw large sums of money into an attempt to take over the Gujarati newspaper industry. And it will be some time before international proprietors see profit in dominating the market in Oriya or even in Tamil, Malayalam or Hindi. In a sense, weakness was strength: the relative weakness of Indian consumerism protected regional newspapers and their owners. The different scripts accentuated the unattractiveness of Indian-language newspapers to outside investors. Being indecipherable helped to camouflage Indian-language newspapers from the world. A Rupert Murdoch could read the mastheads and headlines even of his Hungarian newspapers. In India there was not merely one unintelligible script; there was a babel of ten.

Table 5.4. MAJOR NEWSPAPER COMPANIES FOUNDED BEFORE, OR AT THE TIME OF, INDEPENDENCE

	Legal status	Founded
Indian Express (dailies in 6 Indian languages)	Public	1932
Malayala Manorama	Public	1889
Hind Samachar*	Private	1948
Hindustan (Hindustan Times)	Public	1927
Ananda Bazar Patrika	Private	1922
The Hindu (no Indian-language publications)	Public	1878
Aj	Private	1920
Mathrubhumi	Private	1923
Dainik Jagran	Private	1947
Thanthi	Trust	1942
Prajavani (The Printers, Mysore)	Public	1948
Amar Ujala	Partnership	1948

Sources: *PIIs* and interviews.

* The Hind Samachar company began the Urdu daily, *Hind Samachar*, in 1948. The Hindi daily, *Punjab Kesari*, was started in 1965.

The financial strength and the origins of Indian-language newspapers are inter-related. Of the twenty-one dailies in Table 5.3, twelve were founded before or at the time of independence (Table 5.4). All twelve were either public companies or "deemed" to be public companies because of their size. Under the Companies Act, amended in 1956 and 1988, a private company is deemed to be a public company – and must satisfy the reporting requirements of a public company – if its average annual turnover for three years exceeds Rs 10 crores or about US \$2.85 million. Private companies may not have more than fifty shareholders, nor invite the general public to buy shares; transfer of their shares is also restricted.⁴⁴ All of the newspapers among the top twenty-one exceeded this threshold of Rs 10 crores.

The important contrast with other countries was that no Indian newspaper was a listed company on the stock exchange. In the United States organizations like the Gannett chain, the largest US newspaper chain, listed their shares in the 1960s. Gannett produced "a spectacular record of ever-increasing quarterly earnings" for shareholders.⁴⁵ While such public listing allowed an organization to garner investment capital without having to borrow, such a public company ran the risk of takeover by "outsiders". If hostile investors acquired enough shares, they could push aside the founders. Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, a favourite stock with investors around the world, was partly insulated against such possibilities. Though Murdoch himself controlled "less than a third" of News Corporation, various categories of shareholding, and his own association with profits and success, allowed him to direct the empire and plan to pass it on to his sons and daughter.⁴⁶ In India, however, no newspaper was listed on the stock exchange, and the overwhelming majority were private companies or "closely held" public companies – companies registered as public but with shares held by a tight circle, usually of family members.

The twelve big newspapers that dated from the independence struggle or its immediate aftermath in 1948 were by no means extravagantly idealistic or commercially naive. But most began small. Accounts of their origins often emphasized the family commitment to the newspaper. Y.M. Gupta, son of the founder of *Dainik Jagran*, said:

My father, when he started the newspaper [in Jhansi in 1942], he himself was the editor. He was composing by himself. My mother was reading – doing proof reading. My father was operating the machine and printing it, and in the morning after printing the newspaper, he used to go for sales, and he was selling it through

⁴⁴ Interview, V. H. Joshi, Company Secretary, *Sakal*, Pune, 22 March 1993.

⁴⁵ Bagdikian, *Media Monopoly*, p. 73.

⁴⁶ Alan Kohler in the *Age* (Melbourne), 19 April 1997, p. A17.

the help of hawkers.[...] In fact, he was all in one. So that is how he started his operation.

Slowly, the changing nature of the business required and permitted more elaborate systems. Y.M. Gupta's account is worth following because it tells a story repeated at other newspapers:

After independence...we came down to Kanpur, and...then he formed a team. There [were] ... three main departments: ... the production side, the circulation side and the editorial side. But the advertising side was not very well organised.[...] He was himself doing the advertising, but he was not able to devote much time ...

When I came in[to the paper about 1959], ... he said, "Come to Bombay with me and I will show you another world." So then he showed me the marketing side of newspapers.[...] He said, "I want that you should develop this wing of the newspaper."

[...] I never concentrated on [the] Kanpur market, because ... the concept of selling ... advertising ... was just like taking ... money from somebody [as a donation] and ... [people felt they were obliging you]: "I am doing this thing for you." So I never went to the local market because those people were not professionally enlightened on the subject and ... were thinking in terms of charity.⁴⁷

These were the attitudes of traders, not capitalists. But at varying speeds traders around the country became capitalists because they both had to and wanted to. When an equal suddenly drives away in a car, it is both demeaning and dangerous to continue to ride a bicycle. From the 1970s, as capitalist pressures and practices spread, so did the pressure for newspaper expansion, and an emphasis within newspapers on modern management and maximizing profits. The Ananda Bazar Patrika chain brought in management consultants in 1973:

They went into our financial accounting system, advertising systems, material systems, job evaluation, the entire spectrum ... – production, cost control, stocks, everything. And ... we implemented more or less all their recommendations.⁴⁸

The same consultants did similar work for Malayala Manorama in 1979.⁴⁹

The compulsions of capitalism explained the ownership of four of the 21 large dailies of the 1990s. Capitalists, wealthy from other enterprises, purchased them to acquire a voice, as Ramakrishna Dalmia did when he bought Bennett Coleman in 1945 (see Table 4.5). In Gujarat in the 1950s, successful business families with varied economic interests acquired both the big old nationalist newspapers, *Gujarat Samachar*, founded in 1932, and *Sandesh*, founded in 1923. One of Gujarat's pioneer advertising agents, Shantilal Shah (1920-c.1984), took over the failing

⁴⁷ Interview, Y.M. Gupta, Marketing Director, *Dainik Jagran*, Kanpur, 11 May 1993.

⁴⁸ Interview, Arup Sarkar, member of owning family, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta, 5 January 1994.

⁴⁹ Interview, K.M. Mathew, Chief Editor, *Chandigarh*, Kanpur, 11 May 1993.

Gujarat Samachar from its founder in 1952. *Sandesh* changed hands similarly in 1958 when another businessman, Chimanbhai Patel (1918-96?), bought it from the ailing nationalist who started it during the struggles against the British.⁵⁰ *Sakal*, the Marathi daily of Pune, similarly passed from the heirs of Dr Parulekar to the family of the politician Sharad Pawar in 1985.

Table 5.5. EXISTING NEWSPAPERS ACQUIRED BY BUSINESS FAMILIES, 1945-85

	Bought	Begun	Legal status
Bennett Coleman	1945	1838	Closely held public company
Lok Prakashan (<i>Gujarat Samachar</i>)	1952	1932	Closely held public company
<i>Sandesh</i>	1958	1923	Closely held public company
<i>Sakal</i>	1986	1932	Closely held public company after change of owners

Note: "Closely held" means shareholders are limited and shares are not listed or traded.

We can distinguish a third category among the twenty-one leading dailies: newspapers started from scratch by capitalists great and small since independence (see Table 5.6). *Rajasthan Patrika* began as "a single broadsheet ... evening newspaper" in 1956-61, became a six-page morning daily in 1966, and by the mid-1990s was one of the largest and best-designed Hindi dailies in the country, confident enough to quarrel and break with the Audit Bureau in 1995.⁵¹ K.C. Kulish, the founder, and a sympathizer of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh,⁵² started as a sub-editor and developed an ambition to start his own "independent and commercially viable newspaper".⁵³ The aspirations and conviction recall *Eenadu's* origins, but Ramoji Rao, although he shared Kulish's zeal, was already a substantial capitalist and experienced advertiser and

⁵⁰ Interview, Shreyans Shah, Managing Editor, and Nirmam Shah, Executive Editor, *Gujarat Samachar*, Ahmedabad, 1 February 1999. Interview, Balwant Shah, senior editorial executive, and P. G. Joshi, Chief Executive, *Sandesh*, Ahmedabad, 2 February 1999. Interview, Vijay Sanghvi, formerly of *Sandesh*, New Delhi, 9 May 1993.

⁵¹ Maslog, *5 Successful*, pp. 107-16. *ABC January-June 1995*, p. 3. B. S. Thakur, *Rajasthan Patrika: Keeping the Reader's Faith* (Jaipur: Rajasthan Patrika, 1997), pp. 6, 36, 42, 44-5.

⁵² *Organiser*, 7 November 1993, p. 11, for his speech to an RSS meeting in Nagpur. Thakur, *Rajasthan Patrika*, p. 41. "Kulish" is a pen-name. "Kothari" is the family name. Two sons, Gulab Kothari and Milap Kothari, became managers of the newspaper in the 1980s. *PAYB*, 1996-7, p. 113c.

⁵³ Maslog, *5 Successful*, p. 109.

marketeer. The Bengali daily *Bartaman*, the youngest of the newspapers in this category, had similarities with *Eenadu*: a successful capitalist had the money and the passion to start a newspaper and make it succeed.

Table 5.6. MAJOR DAILIES FOUNDED SINCE 1948

Proprietors	Founded	Legal status
Ushodaya Publications (<i>Eenadu</i>)	1974	Private company
<i>Rajasthan Patrika</i>	1956	Private company
<i>Dinamalar</i>	1951	Partnership
Kumar Publications Trust (<i>Dinakaran</i>)	1977	Partnership
<i>Bartaman</i>	1984	Private company

Note: Partnerships at one time needed less complex accounting procedures to satisfy legal requirements. By the 1990s this was no longer so. Partnerships lead to major difficulties in transferring entitlements when a partner dies. In 1999 both the partnerships above wanted to become companies, but found the transformation difficult for various legal and family reasons.

Twenty-one newspapers may have controlled 70 per cent of daily circulations; but more than a thousand dailies supplying the Registrar of Newspapers with circulation data in 1995 divided the remaining 30 per cent of circulation among them. This represented a remarkable diversity and suggested that the industry was still open and in flux. Indeed the Registrar had records of 4,236 dailies around the country, though most of these we may assume were long-dead.⁵⁴ And even though the Registrar's figures were no doubt inflated, the Audit Bureau of Circulations, a far more select club, had 165 fee-paying dailies on its books in 1994.⁵⁵

The Registrar's difficulty in maintaining reliable records underlined an openness that still characterized the Indian-language-newspaper industry. Rags-to-riches stories were possible, as the story of *Rajasthan Patrika* in Jaipur showed. In Kerala *Mangalam*, the weekly magazine, began in 1969 as the idea of newspaper seller and production employee, M.C. Varghese. By the mid-1980s, it was for a time the largest selling publication in India, surpassing *Manorama Weekly* and forcing the Malayala Manorama group to revamp its weekly magazine.⁵⁶ Indeed, even in the late 1990s the newspaper industry still seemed open enough for the Bhopal-based *Dainik Bhaskar* to launch an edition in Jaipur to challenge *Rajasthan Patrika*.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ PII, 1996, pp. 1, 7, 124.

⁵⁵ ABC January-June 1994, p. 6.

⁵⁶ Interview, K.M. Roy, General Manager, *Mangalam* (daily), Kottayam, 8 April 1997. ABC January-June 1988, p. 9, showed *Mangalam* with a circulation of 1.2 million and *Manorama Weekly*'s 846,000.

⁵⁷ BL 10-23 February 1997, p. 124, and 14-15 September 1998, p. 66.

The ownership of Indian-language newspapers varied from vast businesses like Bennett Coleman at one end of the spectrum to "the racketeer's sheet" at the other. The latter, wrote T.J.S. George, "abound[s] in provincial capitals and district headquarters". Small-town fly-by-night operators had room to survive, their durability borne out in the 1990s by the adjudications of the Press Council of India.⁵⁸

Newspaper families often distinguished between those whose interests were only in newspapers and those who were capitalists in their own right in other enterprises. Of the twenty-one leaders, nine could be classed as chiefly media organizations, ten had substantial other interests, and about two others no information was available (see Table 5.7). Such calculations were open to qualification. *Mathrubhumi*, for example, had in fact been controlled though a shareholding company by shareholders with a variety of outside interests including plantations and trucking. The Indian Express chain might claim that media was its overwhelming interest, yet the assets of the Indian Express in real estate – choice land in major cities – were fabled.⁵⁹

To minimize their obligations to government and employees, newspaper-owning families created imaginative financial structures. From 1955, the wages of journalists and other newspaper workers were regulated by national awards, set by a wage board under an ex-judge. Between the 1950s and 1990s, five such boards set salary levels according to the "gross revenue" of the newspaper.⁶⁰ The bigger the "gross revenue", the higher the salary of employees. This provided "an inbuilt incentive to resort to devices which allow the figures of gross revenue being exhibited at a level lower than it really is".⁶¹ The most common device was to divide a newspaper's activities into a number of businesses which in theory were distinct and self-contained. Managements sometimes claimed that each production centre was a different newspaper and that, for example, a newspaper like *Sakal* should not be judged on its total turnover; rather, each unit should be treated individually. It was unfair and unreasonable, according to this argument, to pay an employee on the loss-making Mumbai edition the same as an employee on the immensely profitable Pune edition.⁶² At *Eenadu* various divisions

⁵⁸ George, *Provincial Press*, pp. 6-7. *Press Council of India Review*, vol. 13, no. 3 (July 1992), pp. 122-4 for example.

⁵⁹ *Report...Fact-Finding*, p. 79, claimed the Indian Express chain had earned Rs 114 lakhs in 1973 from property rents.

⁶⁰ The sixth such inquiry, under the retired judge R.K. Manisana Singh, was constituted in 1998.

⁶¹ *Report of the Wage Boards for Working Journalists and Non-Journalist Newspaper Employees* (New Delhi: Ministry of Labour, 1989), p. 62.

⁶² Interview, V.H. Joshi, Company Secretary, *Sakal*, Pune, 22 March 1993.

Table 5.7. MAJOR NEWSPAPERS WITH AND WITHOUT OTHER COMMERCIAL INTERESTS

<i>Newspaper organizations with other business interests</i>	<i>Headquarters</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Bennett Coleman	Mumbai	Jain family – various industries.
Indian Express	Mumbai & Chennai	Divided between two family branches since 1997. Real estate.
Malayala Manorama	Kottayam	Kandathil family. Relatives have plantations and Madras Rubber Factory.
Hindustan Times	New Delhi	Birla family.
Ushodaya Publications (Eenadu)	Hyderabad	Ramoji Rao – chit funds, food processing, films.
The Printers (Mysore) (Deccan Herald, Prajavani)	Bangalore	Hari Kumar and family – original wealth came from liquor trade.
Sakal	Pune	Pawar family – various businesses.
Bartaman	Calcutta	Sinha family – commercial interests in eastern India.
Lok Prakashan (Gujarat Samachar)	Ahmedabad	Shantilal Shah, who acquired the paper in 1952, was a pioneer advertising agent in Gujarat.
Sandesh	Ahmedabad	Chimanbhai Patel, who acquired the paper in 1958, was described as “a businessman”.
<i>Newspaper organizations without other business interests</i>	<i>Headquarters</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Hind Samachar (Punjab Kesari)	Jalandhar	
Ananda Bazar Patrika	Calcutta	
Kasturi and Sons (Hindu)	Chennai	
Aj	Varanasi	
Mathrubhumi	Calicut	Major shareholders have other business interests.
Dainik Jagran	Kanpur	
Thanthi Trust	Chennai	Complicated “trust” structure involves management of a number of colleges.
Rajasthan Patrika	Jaipur	
Dinamalar	Chennai	Founding family owned salt pans in the old Travancore state. Held as a partnership. Relatives of current managing family have other interests.
Kumar Publications Trust (Dinakaran)	Chennai	Held as a partnership.
Amar Ujala	Agra	

of newspaper operation were carried out by different individual companies. Thus a separate company, though doing everything one would expect employees of *Eenadu* to do and working in the *Eenadu* building, did the news-gathering and sold its services to the newspaper. The Indian Express was long divided into a complicated structure involving notionally independent companies.⁶³ In March 1997, this provided the basis for a division of the chain on a north-south basis between Ramnath Goenka's rival heirs.⁶⁴ "Trusts" aiming for taxation advantages provided the structure for *Dina Thanthi*, and "trust" figured in the legal description of *Dinakaran*, although it was effectively a legal "partnership".⁶⁵ And the courts could be used to delay or overturn unwelcome wage awards. The Bachawat committee (named for its chairman U.N. Bachawat, a retired judge of the Madhya Pradesh High Court) reported in May 1989. By 1993, close to 1,000 newspapers had not implemented the award, and others had filed writs against it in the Supreme Court.⁶⁶ When the successor to Bachawat was appointed in 1998, the Indian Languages Newspaper Associated (ILNA) pointed out the futility of the task: "60% of the newspaper establishments have chosen not to implement the Bachawat Award" and got away with it.⁶⁷

On the surface one might expect that ownership within a single family would simplify the legal and financial structures of newspapers. Internally this may have been so; agreements and decisions could be made quickly, often over breakfast, since some families, such as the Chopras of *Punjab Kesari* in Jalandhar and the Guptas of *Dainik Jagran* in Kanpur, lived together as a joint-family in the same large house. However, "Partnerships" were legally messy when one of the partners died and left a number of heirs. A company structure, with shares parcelled out among family members and collaborating associates, was more effective.

⁶³ See, for example, *PIL*, 1995, pp. 87-90. *Press Commission, 1954*, Part III, Appendices, pp. 361-2, sets out the early history of the *Indian Express* arrangements.

⁶⁴ *Frontline*, 7 April 1995, pp. 109-11. *IT*, 31 March 1995, pp. 66-9. Interview, T.N.C. Veeraraghavan, Director (Corporate Planning), Express Publications (Madurai) Ltd, Chennai, 19 January 1999.

⁶⁵ *PIL*, 1995, pp. 96-7, 108. Interview, K. Kumaran, *Dinakaran*, Chennai, 18 January 1999. Interview, T.K. Rajagopal, *Dina Thanthi*, Chennai, 20 January 1999.

⁶⁶ *Language Press Bulletin*, vol. 40, no. 5 (February 1993), p. 8, quoting the reply to Question No. 3125 in the Rajya Sabha. See also Phani Bhusan Chakraborty and Brojen Bhattacharya, *News Behind Newspapers* (New Delhi: Minerva, 1989), pp. 96-9.

⁶⁷ "Memorandum before the Hon'ble R.K. Manisana Singh, wage Board for Journalists and Non-Journalist Newspaper Employees" (Mumbai: Indian Languages Newspapers Association, n.d. [January 1999]), p. 6. I am grateful to Pratap Shah, editor of *Saurashtra Samachar*, for providing me with this document.

Family arrangements, however, were private arrangements, which for outsiders made the task of gauging the size and structures of many Indian-language newspapers difficult. The attempt by the Registrar of Newspapers to keep track of who owned newspapers and how they were owned, which occupied a chapter of the annual report *Press in India* from its inception in 1957, illustrated the difficulties.⁶⁸ These complications grew in the 1990s as a number of newspaper families began to experiment with other media, especially television. Ramoji Rao's companies, for example, started Eenadu Television. The family and DMK associates of Murasoli Maran, the Tamil politician and writer, began Sun-TV in Tamil in 1993.⁶⁹ *Dainik Jagran* and *Nai Duniya* put their Hindi newspapers on the World Wide Web in 1996. Such speculative ventures into new communications required capital and management. The family owners of Indian-language newspapers were increasingly forced to adopt less family-oriented mechanisms as their activities became more complicated. As they did so, the structures of their businesses became more complex. The trader-family edged towards full-scale, floated-on-the-share-market capitalism. Yet in the 1990s – in striking contrast to the United States or Britain – no Indian newspaper was listed on Indian stock exchanges.

Indian-language newspapers – indeed, all Indian newspapers – were relatively small businesses by world standards. Table 5.8 estimates annual turnover for nine chains of various size in 1992-3. Pinches of salt need to be taken when considering these estimates since they are based either on interviews or on journalists' reports. Nevertheless, they provide broad parameters, and since proprietors probably exaggerated a little when they discussed their turnover, the table probably provides some upper limits. Even Bennett Coleman's turnover of Rs 400 crores or US \$115 million was modest, though the company was said to have made a profit of Rs 80-90 crores or 20 per cent of turnover.⁷⁰ If others did as well, even *Prajatantra*, Orissa's second-ranking daily, would have made a profit of Rs 6 million or US \$170,000. In a state with an average *per capita* income lower than any other except Bihar and Kashmir,

⁶⁸ It was Chapter 6 of the report in the beginning, became Chapter 4 in the 1960s and has been Chapter 5 since 1981. Each year, however, it is a mechanical exercise, and the content changes little.

⁶⁹ *BI*, 9-22 September 1996, pp. 55-6, for Sun-TV. *Himal*, June 1996 (<http://www.south-asia.com/himal/June/orbital.htm>) for Eenadu-TV. *A&M*, 31 May 1996, p. 50. *Indian Express*, 8 September 1996 (<http://express.india-world.com/ie/daily/19960908/25250192.html>). See also *BI*, 31 January-13 February 1994, pp. 143-4.

⁷⁰ *BI*, 28 March-10 April 1994, p. 168. In 1995-6, Reliance Industries was India's largest listed company with a turnover of Rs 1,305 crores. *BI*, 21 October-3 November 1996, p. 131.

⁷¹ *SQL*, 1996-7, p. 19.

these were influential amounts. With organizations like Bennett Coleman and Malayala Manorama, an analyst must also ask where one business interest ended and another began. Networks of family connections and family companies made precise estimates impossible.

TABLE 5.8. ESTIMATED ANNUAL TURNOVER OF
12 ABC-MEMBER DAILIES, 1992-3

<i>Newspaper</i>	<i>Annual turnover (Rs crores)</i>	<i>US \$ m.</i>	<i>Source</i>
1. Bennett Coleman Company Ltd (E, H, Mar)	400	115	<i>Frontline</i> , 25 February 1994, p. 95.
2. Ananda Bazar Patrika (B, E)	100	30	Interview, Calcutta, 5 January 1994
3. Hind Samachar (<i>Punjab Kesari</i> – H, P, U)	"touching" 100	30	Interview, New Delhi, 6 May 1993
4. Dainik Jagran (H)	"around" 50	15	Interview, New Delhi, 7 May 1993
5. Malayala Manorama (E, Mal)	50	15	Interview, Kottayam, 8 April 1993
6. Mathrubhumi (Mal)	40	12	Interview, Calicut, 2 April 1993
7. Sakal (Mar)	30	9	Interview, Pune, 19 March 1993
8. Dinamani (Tam)*	11	3	Statement, 1992-3, 25 January 1999
9. Kerala Kaumudi (Mal)	8	2	Interview, Trivandrum, 15 April 1993
10. Kannada Prabha (K)*	6	1.8	Statement, 1992-3, 25 January 1999
11. Prajatantra (O)	3	1	Interview, Cuttack, 31 December 1993
12. Andhra Prabha (Tel)*	3	1	Statement, 1992-3, 25 January 1999

Abbreviations: E=English; H=Hindi; Mal=Malayalam; Mar=Marathi; O=Oriya; P=Punjabi; U=Urdu
*These newspapers belong to the Indian Express chain. Their individual turnovers were given to me in a printed table during interviews at the New Indian Express headquarters in Chennai, 25 January 1999.

The value of a newspaper far exceeded its price, because a newspaper brought prestige that owning a steel mill did not. In 1970, Mankekar noted the tendency of "non-participating proprietors ... to call themselves editors for the love of it".⁷² Foes of Ramoji Rao in Andhra Pradesh accused him of the same sin: claiming to be an editor when he was

⁷² Mankekar, *What Ails the Indian Press?*, p. 17.

merely an interfering proprietor.⁷³ When Nelson Mandela visited in 1994, snide observers believed that Samir Jain, the young managing director and part-owner of Bennett Coleman, was "most upset" by the fact that Mandela spent "a long time" talking to the editor of the *Times of India* but "did not pay much attention" to him.⁷⁴

Newspapers benefited their owners in more tangible ways than simple ego inflation. Newspapers promoted political and economic interests. Newly wealthy commercial and industrial families started newspapers both to proclaim the arrival of their owners and to propagate their ideas. Sahara India, a group of companies begun in Gorakhpur in eastern Uttar Pradesh in 1978 by Subrata Rai, started a Hindi daily, *Rashtriya Sahara*, in Lucknow in 1992, and later opened a New Delhi edition. Founded on "parabanking", a version of a savings-and-loan or, some might have said, Ramoji Rao's early chit funds, Sahara India ran an airline and real estate developments. Its well-produced newspaper, said to be losing money heavily at the start, quickly became Lucknow's favourite and made inroads in New Delhi. It was a member of the Audit Bureau from 1996, by which time it had a combined circulation of 220,000. Subrata Rai was reputedly "not squeamish about using his newspapers to further his businesses".⁷⁵ In Hyderabad in 1996 the Sanghi family of industrialists started *Vaaritha* to challenge *Eenadu*, and hired A. B. K. Prasad, a former *Eenadu* editor and bitter critic of Ramoji Rao, to edit it.⁷⁶ In the early 1990s one newspaper executive estimated the cost of starting a daily in south India at Rs 2-3 crores (about US \$850,000).⁷⁷ This was a substantial but not outrageous sum – particularly given the joy and influence it could bring to a wealthy family looking for honour and advantage.

Influence and profit no doubt made newspaper ownership attractive. But they also brought dangers. Proprietors great and small were vulnerable – to governments, enemies and, most ruthlessly of all, to capitalism itself. As we shall see in Chapter 7 ("Controlling"), newspaper owners and workers experienced direct pressures, threats and dangers.

⁷³ Interview, A.B.K. Prasad, Managing Director, ABK Publications, Hyderabad. 6 March 1993.

⁷⁴ Ajit Bhattacharjee in the *Pioneer*, 17 March 1994, p. 8.

⁷⁵ "Sahara India. An Emotionally Integrated Indian Family", promotional brochure, given to me at interview, Madhav Kant Mishra, Editorial Adviser, *Rashtriya Sahara*, Noida. New Delhi, 14 January 1994. *IT*, 15 March 1997, p. 49. Circulation had fallen to 197,000 by 1998. *ABC January-June 1998*.

⁷⁶ *BI*, 8-21 April 1996, pp. 146-7.

⁷⁷ Interview, K.N. Nambisan, General Manager (Finance), *Mathrubhumi*, Calicut. 3 April 1993. *Mathrubhumi* was about to open an edition in Cannanore, so the estimate has some basis.

And, less obvious but more menacing, they all faced the possibility of economic failure.

As the most public expression of capitalism, newspapers were especially exposed to the expectations of capitalism. If a factory is a day late with an order, few people will notice; but if a daily newspaper misses a single day, speculation spreads quickly round the region. Hawkers sell other newspapers; readers buy them; and people gossip that the company is in trouble.

Because Indian-language newspapers were almost all family affairs, they were especially vulnerable to the problems that arise when a new generation takes over from its seniors. "Genetic roulette", Bagdikian called it when writing of the United States. An able heir produced a successful newspaper; less able heirs frittered away the inheritance. If there were a lot of heirs, "the paper fragments under Malthusian subdivision of dividends and control until it is drained and thrown aside."⁷⁸ In India two notable failures exemplified both the pressures of the industry and the pitfalls of family business. Indeed, perhaps these pitfalls are inevitable when traders become capitalists.

Until its closure in April 1991, *Andhra Patrika* was the oldest surviving Telugu newspaper. Founded in Bombay in 1914, it later moved to Madras (Chennai) and after the creation of Andhra Pradesh in the 1950s to Hyderabad and Vijayawada. Originally it had been a wealthy idealist's contribution to the national movement – his money, it is said, came from manufacture of a headache balm⁷⁹ – but, from the mid-1980s its circulation collapsed, falling from 43,000 in 1984 to 26,000 in 1986 in the face of the appealing design and acute marketing of papers like *Eenadu* and *Udayam*.⁸⁰ The owners of *Andhra Patrika*, who reputedly put little investment or interest into the paper, looked for buyers. A capitalist bought the newspaper with a view to making it his voice, but soon clashed with a staff of 350 permanent employees whose wages were not being paid regularly. By August 1990 the courts had appointed a manager, and the paper stopped publishing eight months later. Attempts to revive it failed, even after the president of the employees' union became Andhra Pradesh's Labour Minister.⁸¹

The example of *Andhra Patrika* is similar to that of another one-time regional institution, *Amrita Bazar Patrika* in Bengal. Founded by the Ghosh family as a Bengali newspaper in 1868, it switched to English in 1878 to escape the Vernacular Press Act introduced during the tenure

⁷⁸ Bagdikian, *Information Machine*, p. 120.

⁷⁹ Interview, A.B.K. Prasad, Hyderabad, 6 March 1993.

⁸⁰ *PAYB*, 1987, p. 108c.

⁸¹ *Sunday Mail* (Madras), 11 August 1991. I am grateful to A. K. Das Gupta, Chief of Research at *Eenadu*, for providing me with clippings. *Hindu*, 2 May 1993.

of the British Viceroy, Lord Lytton, to control Indian-language newspapers. A pillar of Bengali life, *Amrita Bazar Patrika* launched its own Bengali daily, *Jugantar*, in 1937. In the mid-1980s *Jugantar* was the second largest (circ. 312,000) Bengali daily in India after its old rival *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, which in English was second (circ. 127,000) in Calcutta to the *Statesman*. In December 1990, however, both *Jugantar* and *Amrita Bazar Patrika* closed after workers' unrest and management's failure to pay salaries. The problem was familiar: an old proprietorial family had been unable or unwilling to introduce new technology and styles of production. The cost of newsprint and salaries increased; circulation and advertising revenues fell, skimmed off by bustling rivals. When the papers were restarted in January 1994, having received loans of more than Rs 10 crores (about US \$3 million), they had 825 permanent employees on their books, roughly double the number they were said to require. The Ghosh family prided itself on having only newspapers among its economic interests. Its political influence – it usually had a Congress MP in the family – was reputed to have allowed the papers to reopen.⁸² But they closed again, probably for the last time, at the end of 1995.⁸³

The failure at the beginning of the 1980s of *Andhra Patrika* and *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, both family-owned and with their roots deep in the nationalist struggle, emphasized the way in which capitalism now drove newspapers. Earlier, an established newspaper could ensure its share of government advertisements, count on major private advertisers to buy space in its English publications, print a dull and smudgy newspaper and allow its workforce to multiply. The families and newspapers that survived in Bagdikian's "genetic roulette" were able to adapt: to take on new technology, production methods and, most of all, ways of marketing their newspapers to readers and advertisers. Indian newspapers, like liberal, free-market newspapers everywhere, climbed onto a treadmill from which escape comes only by failing and falling off.

Newspapers, however, have greater implications locked up within them than other businesses. Their arrival affects the potential and the scope of politics as no other business can, and the owners bear this transformative responsibility sometimes knowingly and gladly, sometimes unconsciously; but they cannot escape it.

⁸² *BI*, 22 November-5 December 1993, p. 136. Interview, Tamal Kanti Ghosh, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, on the Kalka Mail between Calcutta and Allahabad, 9 January 1994.

⁸³ Interview, P.K. Roy, Editor in Chief, *Aikya Melhama*, 1 April 1997.

Parties, Politics and "the Nation"

Newspapers could logically provide the foundation for secessionism. It is possible to imagine that powerful owners could use Indian-language newspapers to build regional political movements calling for nationhood based on a region's language and culture. There is a suggestion that this is what happened, in part at least, in Europe in the nineteenth century, where printers and publicists were vital in propagating nationalisms. In India in the 1990s, however, various cords kept proprietorial balloons tied to the Indian state and prevented them from drifting off towards distant goals of "nationhood".

Newspaper proprietors were no doubt in the thick of their region's politics. Anyone who has sat in newspaper offices will have marvelled at the procession of petitioners waiting upon editors and proprietors. But proprietors' conduct in politics was modulated by the need to serve the interests of their businesses – their newspapers. It was usually a mistake, which most proprietors realized, to put the newspaper business second and politics first.

The proprietors of Indian-language newspapers acted as hinges, linking their regions to the Indian state and that state to their regions. Virtually every newspaper-owning family was a committed member of the *national* – the Indian – elite as well as being a defining member of the elite of its region. These families enjoyed two things: being at the very top of society in their own regions while being influential nationally as well. They did this partly through conviction – belief in the benefits of an Indian nation – and partly through interest – knowledge that national and multi-national advertising made their newspapers profitable and such advertising depended on a strong Indian state and the national links that went with it.

Proprietors and editors interacted regularly in a number of nationwide forums. Most substantial newspapers were members of the Audit Bureau of Circulations, based in Bombay (Mumbai), and whose activities we have already examined. Nearly all newspapers of any size were members of the Indian Newspaper Society, founded in 1939 as the Indian and Eastern Newspaper Society (IENS), which had its office in New Delhi.⁸⁴ Editors – including proprietors who wanted to be editors – met in the All India Newspaper Editors Conference, founded in 1940 (see Table 5.9).

Some of these bodies provided prominent perches where a proprietor or editor might occasionally preen. The Press Council and the Registrar's office, on the other hand, were government impositions, grumblingly

⁸⁴ *Indian Newspaper Society Press Handbook 1995* (New Delhi: Indian Newspaper Society, 1996), pp. LII–LXXII. There were 716 members in 1995.

accepted. The ABC and the INS were vital because they affected advertising. These associations also indicated rivalries and competition – e.g. the proliferation of bodies for “small” newspapers. To be one of the presiding figures in an apex organization could be part of the joys of recognition that came with proprietorship. Owners therefore moved – or aspired to move – at two levels: as people of influence in their state capitals and as people with standing in New Delhi at the level of the nation.

TABLE 5.9. NATIONAL FORUMS OF NEWSPAPERS
AND JOURNALISTS

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>City</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
All India Newspaper Editors Conference	1940	Delhi	Editorial affairs
All India Small and Medium Newspapers' Association	1972	Delhi	Interests of smaller newspapers (claimed 671 members 1995)
All India Small and Medium Newspapers' Federation	1964	Delhi	Same as above
All India Small Newspapers' Federation	–	Moradabad	Same as above?
All India Urdu Small Newspaper Editors' Council	1969	Delhi	Urdu journalism and language
Association of Small Newspapers of India	1985	Kanpur	Interests of small newspapers (claimed 430 members 1995)
Audit Bureau of Circulations	1948	Mumbai	Check members' circulations (338 publications 1996, plus advertisers and ad agencies)
Indian Newspaper Society	1939	Delhi	Business interests of members – accredits advertising agencies
Indian Federation of Small and Medium Newspapers	1984	Delhi	Interests of smaller newspapers
Indian Languages Newspaper Association	1941	Mumbai	Interests of Indian-language papers
Indian Rural Press Association	1973	Delhi	Publications devoting 40% of space to agriculture
Press Council of India	1966	Delhi	Govt body to hear complaints
Press Institute of India	1963	Delhi	Professional development of newspapers and journalists
Registrar of Newspapers for India	1956	Delhi	Govt monitor of newspapers in India (lists 4,000 dailies 1995)
Research Institute for Newspaper Development	1978	Chennai	Technical support to newspaper industry

Source: PAYB, 1995, pp. 37a-38a.

Occasionally, to be sure, proprietors threw their papers into a local cause and political movement. In 1982-3, Ramoji Rao and *Eenadu* worked hand in hand with the film star N.T. Rama Rao (1923-95) to build the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and drive it to victory in the Andhra Pradesh elections. The newspaper's offices and teleprinters provided the headquarters and communications system for the new party which, as its name implied, ran on a platform of asserting the dignity of the Telugu people. It was a rallying cry full of incipient nationalism. *Eenadu* correspondents were told to lend all support to the party and even helped "to select candidates". Support for the TDP was company policy. "We [were] doing it", one journalist said, "for our salaries".⁸⁵

Ramoji Rao did not disguise this liaison. He contended that under Congress governments before 1983 the "political system itself was getting destroyed" and that he and the newspaper had to "play a role in building up the nation". N.T. Rama Rao offered an alternative, "and around him we tried to throw our weight and build up an alternative system which catered to reality. We wanted change, he said, not power for ourselves." On voting day 1983, *Eenadu* declared it would thenceforth withdraw from its role as backer of the Telugu Desam Party. In future, it would treat the TDP as any other party.⁸⁶ Thereafter, the paper never again acted as an arm of the party, and by the end of N.T. Rama Rao's career, he and *Eenadu* were adversaries.

Eenadu's position in 1982-3 did not cost lives. In other areas, however, a newspaper's close identification with a political movement, especially a regional or "national" cause, could result in – or provoke? – bloodshed. In Punjab aggressive identification with the Indian state and ridicule of "Khalistan" – the sovereign Sikh state demanded by sections of Sikhs – led to the murder of people associated with the Hind Samachar chain, publishers of *Punjab Kesari* in Hindi and *Jag Bani* in Punjabi. Indeed, the murder of Lala Jagat Narain (1899-1981), founder of the Hind Samachar business, signalled the beginning of the Punjab insurgency in September 1981. Three years later his son Ramesh Chandra was murdered, and by the beginning of 1993 more than sixty of the newspaper's employees had been killed.⁸⁷

Another newspaper in Punjab experienced different pressures. *Ajit*, owned by a Sikh family and the largest Gurmukhi daily (166,000 in 1993), was often blamed by opponents of Khalistan for being too

⁸⁵ Interview, K. Anka Babu, Resident Editor, *Udayam*, Vijayawada, 8 March 1993. Anka Babu was chief political correspondent for *Eenadu* during the 1983 election campaign.

⁸⁶ Interview, Ramoji Rao, Chairman, Ushodaya Enterprises Ltd, Hyderabad, 26 February 1993.

⁸⁷ "Newspaper Group under Siege", cyclostyled, given to me during interviews at Hind Samachar, Jalandhar, 20 May 1993.

sympathetic to the insurgents. But although it printed announcements by the guerrillas, *Ajit* carefully maintained a position in favour of the Indian state and Indian unity. Indeed, in 1998 the paper's editor denounced the "growing communalism in the Sikh milieu", and the paper was burned at meetings of some Sikh militant groups.⁸⁸ Critics had argued earlier that *Ajit* had its cake and ate it – walking a fine line between insurgents and governments. But *Ajit* was also at risk. Hostile state governments of Punjab cut off advertisements and seized editions that officials thought were too solicitous of the Khalistani cause.⁸⁹

The position of *Ajit* and the Hind Samachar chains, caught in the middle of a bloody insurgency, illustrated the limitations on major newspapers. First, successful newspapers reflect what their readers are interested in. A newspaper can take readers only a short distance down paths that readers don't want to follow. Second, successful newspapers are vulnerable. As we see in Chapter 7, newspapers are large, ponderous targets if politics dissolves into gunfire. Hind Samachar was able to take its strong anti-Khalistan position because the Indian state was overwhelmingly (though not totally) dominant in the towns of Punjab; there was protection, even if it was imperfect. No newspaper expounding the views of Khalistanis, on the other hand, would have been permitted to publish. Finally, proprietors of substantial newspapers have learned key lessons about their business: in order to prosper, newspapers need readers, advertisers and the state. To take a newspaper too far into any camp runs the risk of being left with only camp followers as readers. Such lessons, clear during the extreme example of an insurgency, apply also in quieter times and places.

Even newspapers closely associated with politicians and political parties must present themselves as sources of news and amusement in their own right. The most celebrated transformations in the 1990s have been of the two dailies of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), *Ganasakti* in Bengali and *Deshabhimani* in Malayalam. They shocked longtime friends – and foes – in the early 1990s when they began to cover stock markets and religious festivals. They had, said the editor of *Deshabhimani*, to publish a general daily newspaper to maintain sales and get ads. Besides, even if you pray, he continued in justification of the coverage of religious occasions, you can pray for the CPI(M) to be elected.⁹⁰ For newspapers that need to succeed, the compulsions

⁸⁸ *Frontline*, 18 December 1998, p. 42.

⁸⁹ *Tol*, 1 April 1991, p. 10. *Frontline*, 22 September 1995, pp. 34-5.

⁹⁰ Interview, K. Mohanan, Resident Editor, *Deshabhimani*, Trivandrum, 18 April 1993. Interview, Anil Biswas, Editor, *Ganasakti*, Calcutta, 5 January 1994. Both papers survived into the late 1990s, albeit with the advantage of having CPI(M) governments in power in their states: *Deshabhimani* sold 149,000 copies and *Ganasakti* 115,000. *ABC January-June 1998*.

are similar – whether amid the life-and-death struggles of insurgent Punjab or the ideological wrestling matches of Indian Stalinists.

The large Tamil dailies revealed the way successful newspapers balanced the political interests of a proprietor against the need to please readers. At *Dina Thanthi*, Adithanar's restless political aspirations led him and his brother to contest elections and set up political parties from the 1950s. He came to rest for a time in the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), the non-Brahmin, anti-north-Indian party in 1967.⁹¹ When the DMK came to power in that year, Adithanar was elected to the Legislative Assembly, of which he became speaker.⁹² When the DMK split in 1977, he aligned with the new All-India Anna DMK (AIADMK) and was a minister for a time.

Adithanar used to make it a matter of pride that *Dina Thanthi* did not have a conventional editorial page. It did not write leading articles telling its readers how to vote. A longtime associate of Adithanar said:

He treated the readers as very intelligent. "I consider my readers as intelligent as I am. I give you the news. It is for you to take your views." There is no edit page. He thought, "Why should I give you my opinion? You take your own decision."⁹³

As its symbol the paper carried a lighthouse in the masthead – to shed light for the benefit of its readers, not to preach to them. It is unlikely that the columns of *Dina Thanthi* ever did anything to jeopardize the success of Adithanar's political career,⁹⁴ but the paper was more acceptable to readers and therefore a more profitable business without explicit ties to a political party.

In Tamil politics, a sympathetic, mass-circulation newspaper was nevertheless an essential ally of a political party, along with links to the film industry. Both provided ways of connecting regularly with large numbers of potential voters. In 1977 Adithanar's estranged son-in-law founded *Dinakaran* to support the DMK and replace the loss of *Dina Thanthi* (and Adithanar) to the newly formed AIADMK of film star M.G. Ramachandran (1917-87). *Dinakaran* played an important part, the founder's son believed, in keeping the DMK in existence as a vigorous political party during the years out of office in the 1980s.⁹⁵ But the paper was not "a party paper"; rather it was a general daily that invariably saw the world through the DMK's eyes.

Elsewhere, politicians sometimes had newspapers as part of the

⁹¹ Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr., *The Nadars of Tamilnad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 208-20, 235-6. Hardgrave interviewed Adithanar in the early 1960s.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 218-19.

⁹³ Interview, T.K. Rajagopal, Sovereign Media Marketing, Chennai, 20 January 1999.

⁹⁴ *Onlooker*, 16-31 August 1981, p. 16.

⁹⁵ Interview, K. Kumaran, *Dinakaran*, Chennai, 18 January 1999.

armoury of assets that they used to interact with voters and promote their careers. In Orissa, Chief Ministers have invariably been associated with a newspaper. In the best-known example, the nationalist leader and Congress politician, Harekrushna Mahatab (1899-1987), founded *Prajatantra* as a trust in 1947. For years, it was both a platform for rising politicians and a profitable business.⁹⁶ In Mumbai, the Shiv Sena, the aggressive urban Hindu movement of Bal Thackeray, started a daily, *Saamna*, in 1989, which had an audited circulation of 82,000 in 1998. *Saamna* was a strident party mouthpiece, read and supported by adherents. Undisguised party papers, like it and the CPI(M)'s dailies in Kerala and West Bengal, usually benefited from various concessions, handouts and government-sponsored subscriptions when their backers were in power.⁹⁷

Opposition, on the other hand, could have advantages for papers associated with a particular stance or organization. You can have more fun, and entertain your readers better, if you don't have to apologize for the government of the day. In the bloodiest example, *Punjab Kesari* had grief, not fun, but it built a circulation. Associated with fierce Hindu opposition to the Khalistan movement, the paper's circulation rose steadily throughout the insurgent years from 1981-93. Even in 1989-90* when the killing of hawkers drove down circulation of *Jag Bani*, the Punjabi daily produced by the same family, *Punjab Kesari's* sales grew by 120,000 copies.⁹⁸ Readers, its owners believed, sympathized with the paper:

There was a kind of emotional feeling going on in the country ... that my readers, my staff, everybody, they were working as a big team ... because the terrorists were so heavy on us – they wanted to finish us off – and it was a matter of survival for everybody.[...] These ... factors have created the credibility of our newspaper as the most fearless [and] most adventurous.⁹⁹

By 1999 the newspaper's "martyrs' fund" for families whose relatives had been killed had attracted donations of more than Rs 7 crores (US \$1.5 million).¹⁰⁰

Less dramatically, in Tamil Nadu, *Dinakaran* was founded on the support of DMK loyalists, but it grew by acquiring readers among people who enjoyed the robust attacks on the AIADMK governments

⁹⁶ Robin Jeffrey, "Oriya: 'Identifying' ... with Newspapers", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 15 March 1997, pp. 511-14.

⁹⁷ *Frontline*, 16 May 1997, pp. 34-5.

⁹⁸ *ABC January-June 1988* and *ABC January-June 1990*. *Jag Bani* fell from 94,000 copies to 48,000. *Punjab Kesari* rose from 419,000 copies to 539,000.

⁹⁹ Interview, Ashwini Kumar Chopra, Resident Editor, *Punjab Kesari*, New Delhi, 6 May 1993.

¹⁰⁰ *Punjab Kesari*, 10 February 1999, p. iv.

of the 1980s. "The news content ... was basically politics and cinema", one of its proprietors said, and being seen as an 'anti-establishment paper was "very important for our growth". *Dinakaran* won a court order requiring the hostile state government to give it a proportion of government ads. The amount was small, but the interest in the court case "led to the growth in our circulation. Whenever the DMK comes to power, our circulation stagnates because we automatically become like a pro-establishment paper." By 1999, though not a member of the Audit Bureau, *Dinakaran* published from seven centres and claimed a circulation of 350,000, making it one of the three biggest Tamil dailies.¹⁰¹

Readers enjoy vigorous conflict, and in some regions, the contests between proprietors are heated, exhilarating and largely non-political. In Gujarat, the rivalry between the two leading dailies, *Gujarat Samachar* and *Sandesh* was legendary and bitter. "Taking refuge in thuggery and blackmail", *Gujarat Samachar* told readers in 1999, "Falgunbhai [the rival owner] is flailing to save disintegrating *Sandesh*."¹⁰² The story accused the rival paper of running a campaign to have a play banned for obscenity because the play's director had not bought advertisements in *Sandesh*. *Sandesh* replied the next day: "Anyone can use bazaar language and obscene words, but readers buy a paper to read the news. They are not interested in the war of words of the owners of the papers."¹⁰³ In fact, this probably is not so: readers relish a little proprietorial blood-letting.

A variety of motives drives newspaper proprietors. For a newspaper to survive, profit must usually be uppermost, and families, which have inherited newspapers, strive to run them as businesses that bring a good return on capital. This is little different from the joint-stock companies that have taken over the newspaper industry in the United States and Britain since the 1960s. Sometimes, however, people of influence acquire newspapers to seek influence over bureaucracies and politicians. Sometimes, too, the desire to promote a cause or support a party leads to the founding and sustaining of a newspaper. But a profit-making newspaper cannot force causes down readers' throats; causes must be appetizing, as was *Punjab Kesari's* stance against Khalistan to many north Indian Hindi-speakers, *Dinakaran's* contests with AIADMK governments to many Tamils and *Eenadu's* promotion of the Telugu Desam Party. In short, purely party papers struggle to survive, but general dailies adhering to a particular party can do that party a lot of good.

¹⁰¹ *Dina Thanthi* was selling 515,000 copies and *Dinamalar* 407,000 in 1998. ABC January-June 1998.

¹⁰² *Gujarat Samachar*, 3 February 1999, p. 12.

¹⁰³ *Sandesh*, 4 February 1999, p. 16. I am grateful to Rashmi Desai of Melbourne for both translations.

Successful proprietors know that business must prevail over politics if the bills are to be paid. The outcome of riding a hobby-horse and flogging a dead one are likely to be the same.

In comprehending the role of owners in India's newspaper revolution, we lurch between two poles. On the one hand, we may idealize the bold and just proprietor who creates a sense of "the public", gives voice to people previously powerless and revolutionizes social and political relationships. We may have in mind the brave printer of cowboy movies who rides into town with his Columbian press strapped to the back of a mule and brings civic virtue to the lawless west. On the other hand, we may see newspaper proprietors as cynical manipulators of a consumer-led, capitalist-driven process, in which the crudest methods bring the choicest rewards. The printer of the Old West may have been a cheat, a blackmailer and a seller of snake-oil – and so too may a proprietor in small-town (or big-city) India.

When I was doing my preliminary work for this book, journalists sometimes reproached me for being too kind to proprietors who "forsook all professional ethics and made money-making their only aim".¹⁰⁴ Yet I doubt whether there was a golden age when enlightened proprietors spent their fortunes to publish improving newspapers. The diverse and constantly changing landscape of newspapers means that between the extremes, owners perform many functions at once. They all have ends to serve – to make a profit, propagate a philosophy, pamper an ego. However, in putting out a newspaper, they foster transformations that they may seldom think about but are nevertheless profound.

They inform their monolingual fellow citizens about their locality in a persistent, systematic way. The relentless regularity of a newspaper – as well as its order and neatness – gives it the impression of an authority it often does not deserve. "Not only is print a consumer medium and commodity", Marshall McLuhan wrote, "but it taught men how to organize all other activities on a systematic lineal basis."¹⁰⁵ Proprietors do not need to be especially conscious of the subtle processes; it is enough for them to try to work with the grosser ones. As we see in the next chapter, they work through employees – journalists and editors – to produce newspapers that aim to bring unfaltering rewards.

¹⁰⁴ K.R. Sundar Rajan in *Outlook*, 1 March 1999, p. 76, reviewing P. Tharyan, *Good News, Bad News* (New Delhi: Author, 1999).

¹⁰⁵ McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy*, p. 169.

6

REPORTING AND EDITING

Editors and reporters are the key to a newspaper's success. To win readers, it must have writers and editors who understand and reflect readers' concerns. And readers, as the refrain of this book repeats, are essential: when newspapers compete, advertising flows to those with the most readers of the right (potentially consuming) kind. The competition of the 1980s forced Indian-language newspapers to localize their coverage and hire more journalists. Instead of simply a few sub-editors at the production centre, a newspaper needed reporters to find stories that readers cared about. The overall status of people connected with Indian-language newspapers grew, along with their numbers and their influence. Yet many in the 1990s were still trained, treated and paid poorly; and women and Dalits were almost absent from the reporting and editing sides of daily newspapers.

The reporters and particularly editors who face the daily grind of producing a newspaper are sometimes referred to as "gatekeepers" – those who determine what gets into print and what doesn't, what is and isn't news. Bagdikian captured their importance in a description of sub-editors on US newspapers:

The professional at the local hub ... is a crucial, if obscure figure, the local newspaper subeditor who stands between the results of the whole reporting system and the reader.

... the gatekeeper ... is not a valueless machine operating in a social vacuum. His decisions, resulting in the printing of most stories seen by the public, reflect his personal as well as his professional values, and all the surrounding pressures that converge on him.¹

In India, the effects of such pressures revealed themselves in newspaper treatment of the riots following the first march of Hindu zealots on the mosque at Ayodhya in 1990. (The marchers demanded the demolition of a sixteenth-century mosque said to stand on the site of a ransacked temple. A second round of demonstrations destroyed the mosque in December 1992). In the most bizarre example a gatekeeper on *Swatantra Bharat*, a Hindi daily, inserted a handwritten "1" – on the offset plate

¹ Bagdikian, *Information Machines*, pp. 89, 106.

– in front of “15” in a front-page headline to inflate the number said to have been killed in police firing from 15 to 115. In another example, a sub-editor drew bars on the photograph of a religious leader to make it appear he had been imprisoned.² Gatekeepers in India in the 1990s were no different from those in the United States in the 1940s. A sub-editor admitted:

I have a few prejudices. I dislike Truman’s economics, daylight saving time, and warm beer.[...] I am also prejudiced against a publicity-seeking minority with headquarters in Rome, and I don’t help them a lot.³

The background, training and morale of reporters and editors colour everything that a newspaper becomes.

It is difficult to calculate the precise number of journalists in India. The *Report of the Press Commission* in the early 1950s estimated 2,000 fulltime journalists. *Press in India*, the annual report of the Registrar of Newspapers, tried to do a regular count. Its totals grew from about 4,700 journalists receiving either wages or retainers in the early 1960s to about 13,000 in the 1990s. These figures, however, were based only on newspapers that chose to report them to the Registrar – about 300 in 1962 and 320 in 1994.⁴ By the 1990s, 320 dailies represented fewer than a third of dailies that reported to the Registrar about other matters. (It made sense to satisfy the Registrar’s inquiries about consumption of newsprint because next year’s allocation depended on it. It did not make sense to give away too much about employment conditions because wage boards and unions might use it.) The Registrar’s figures suggested a rise: the average number of journalists per newspaper appeared to grow from about fifteen in the early 1960s to forty in the 1990s. Such raw figures supported perceptions of senior editors like the late S. P. Singh: “In the last 10-15 years we have seen a mushroom growth of journalists”.⁵

The number of journalists is important for the influence and status of the profession. If there were more of them, doing more reporting, more people were likely to be influenced by them. We might guess that the 320 newspapers, which told the Registrar how many journalists they employed, were mostly larger papers. To embrace the 700 dailies that reported to the Registrar about other matters but not about employees, we might double the total of 13,000 and estimate that in the 1990s India had about 25,000 journalists on wages or retainers – one journalist

² *Press Council of India Review*, vol. 12, no. 1 (January 1991), p. 53.

³ Quoted in Bagdikian, *Information Machines*, p. 104.

⁴ *PII*, 1963, p. 130. *PII*, 1990, p. 149. *PII*, 1995, p. 146.

⁵ Interview, S.P. Singh, former editor, *Navbharat Times*, New Delhi, 21 February 1993.

for every 35,000 people. This excluded thousands more stringers and occasional contributors.

Journalists' unions tended to be relatively weak. Newspaper unions have proved difficult to sustain even in industrialized countries with high levels of employment. In India, the difficulties were magnified many times. Both the All-India Newspaper Employees' Federation (AINEF), which tried to unite scores of production unions, and the Indian Federation of Working Journalists (IFWJ) suffered from the difficulty of trying to rally small groups of workers scattered around the country. The IFWJ, founded in 1950 and recognized after the First Press Commission as the "representative body of working journalists for official purposes", had rivals in the National Union of Journalists, founded in 1972, and the Indian Journalists' Union, founded in 1990.⁶

At major dailies, managements declared that unions existed, but such unions were often creatures of, or beholden to, management. At *Mathrubhumi* in Calicut in 1993, for example, the managing director said that there had not been a strike for fifteen years and that he was happy to have outsiders meet representatives of the six unions (one for journalists, one for administrators and four for production workers). All six unions, however, were specific to *Mathrubhumi*; none had outside affiliation.⁷ At *Sakal* in Pune management pointed to a single union representing all the workers on the newspaper, and like *Mathrubhumi* it claimed to have placid relations with the union and to have introduced new technology without strikes.⁸

Indian governments committed themselves to national wage-fixing for journalists and other newspaper employees as a result of recommendations of the Press Commission of 1954. For the next four decades government-appointed wage boards, set up under the magnificently named Working Journalists and Other Newspaper Employees (Conditions of Services) and Miscellaneous Provisions Act of 1955, set out national wage scales for newspaper employees. These attempted to take account of fine distinctions about a journalist's experience and a newspaper's size. For example, the Bachawat award of 1989, the fifth

6 Ranabir Samaddar, *Workers and Automation: the Impact of New Technology in the Newspaper Industry* (New Delhi: Sage, 1994), pp. 112-13. Y. Balamurali Krishna (ed.), *Journalists Manual*, 1994 (Vijayawada: Vijayawada Journalists Union, 1994), p. 163. *Frontline*, 25 March 1994, p. 30. *Deccan Herald*, 22 July 1997 [<http://www/deccanherald.com/deccanherald/july22/scribe.html>]. Akhouri Suresh Prasad, "New Challenges," in *Tamilnad Journalists' Union. Third State Conference* (Salem: Tamilnad Journalists' Union, 1998), no page numbers.

7 Interviews, M.P. Veerendrakumar, Chairman and Managing Director, *Mathrubhumi*, Calicut, 2 April 1993, and K. Chandran, union organizer, *Mathrubhumi*, Calicut, 5 April 1993.

⁸ Interview, R.P. Gore, Senior Manager (Personnel), *Sakal*, Pune, 19 March 1993.

since 1955, divided journalists into nine classes.⁹ Each class was subdivided into four or more groups, and each group had half a dozen increment levels within it. At the bottom, a Class IX, Group 4 journalist, the lowest of the levels, started on Rs 1,100 a month. At the top, a Class I, Group 1A, chief news editor, could reach Rs 8,920.¹⁰ The amounts and the classes are less important than the elaborate attempt to categorize and regulate.

Critics attacked labour relations from two directions. Managements railed against national wage-fixing, which, they claimed, treated "all employees similarly – regardless of performance and abilities and skills". The market determined a newspaper's profits, but the government decreed what its wage bill would be. "I cannot", said Vivek Goenka, Ramnath's nephew and one of the heirs to the Indian Express chain, "think of anything more ridiculous".¹¹

Managements also claimed that the national government always appointed a judge sympathetic to journalists' claims to head the wage board. This both pleased journalists, who might then be more sympathetic to politicians, and kept proprietors beholden to the government.¹² Others argued that national wage scales brought undeserved and inflated salary claims from small-town journalists. *Sakal*, which fought such provisions in the courts, argued that it was absurd to pay a journalist working at the small production centre in Nasik the same rates as someone working for the great *Sakal* edition in Pune.¹³ In Varanasi, *Aj* claimed that the Bachawat award, because it did not take account of a paper's ability to pay, had forced *Aj* to drop 150 stringers in favour of forty sales agents who doubled as correspondents.¹⁴ For its part, the Bachawat board disapproved of newspapers' stratagems to escape the provisions of the award and "deprive the workers of their legitimate wages" by creating complicated organizational structures.¹⁵

Critics on the side of journalists and production workers levelled different charges. They held that "the designs of newspaper barons and vested interests of bureaucracy" had succeeded in outwitting weak unions,

⁹ *Report of the Wage Boards for Working Journalists and Non-Journalist Newspaper Employees* (New Delhi: Ministry of Labour, 1989), p. 5. It was named after the retired judge of the Madhya Pradesh High Court who chaired it. Earlier boards were chaired by retired judges Divatia, Bhandarkar, Shinde and Palekar.

¹⁰ K.M. Shrivastava, *Media Issues* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1992), pp. 120-2.

¹¹ *HIE*, 4 October 1997, p. 12.

¹² Interview, Jacob Mathew, Resident Editor and General Manager, *Malayala Manorama*, Calicut, 2 April 1993.

¹³ Interview, V.H. Joshi, Company Secretary, *Sakal*, Pune, 22 March 1993.

¹⁴ Interview, V. Prasad, Director – Development, *Aj*, Varanasi, 11 January 1994.

¹⁵ *Report of the Wage Boards for Working Journalists*, p. 59.

putting many journalists on contracts and introducing new technology.¹⁶ Both federations, according to this critique, focused excessively on the national wage tribunal. To influence the tribunal was a greater goal than to fight for the conditions of workers in production centres. Newspaper owners were therefore able to use the wage tribunal to get technological change accepted; they reduced staff and evaded the tribunal's wage rulings.¹⁷ The life of many journalists was therefore hectic, beholden and unsure.

Shaping

Daily newspapers operate in much the same way throughout the world. Journalists have influence, but they work within tight constraints. At the bottom of the editorial pyramid are "stringers", who are not employees of the newspaper but who send stories to the newspaper from their localities. If their copy is published, they are paid "space rates" – a fixed sum for every column centimetre that appears in the paper. Above stringers, part-time or full-time salaried employees of the newspaper – reporters – may be based in a locality or at the paper's production centre. They engage in a dialogue with superior editors about what stories are to be reported. Newspapers also subscribe to "news agencies" or "wire services" which feed a daily stream of reports to their subscribing publications.¹⁸

Once a "story" – whether from a stringer, a salaried reporter or an agency – reaches a newspaper production centre, it is read by a middle-ranking editor who either rejects it at once or passes it to a sub-editor or copy-editor (a "deskman" in the old language) with instructions about how long the story is to be and what type of headline to put on it. The sub-editor reads the story, edits it for clarity if necessary and writes the headline. The copy is then set in type. Elsewhere, other middle-ranking editors decide what pictures and stories to use and how they are to be displayed. The design and visual impact of the newspaper each day depend on such decisions.

Senior editors oversee this process, whether from afar or close up, depending on their inclinations. Sometimes they give instructions about what news to cover and how to treat it. They may also supervise the hiring of journalists and take pains to ensure that they hire people who have proven "trustworthy" elsewhere. Finally, above the senior editors are the proprietors, who sometimes act as editors as well. If not, the

¹⁶ Akhouri Suresh Prasad, "New Challenges", no page numbers.

¹⁷ Samadar, *Workers*, pp. 22-3.

¹⁸ The two largest news services in India are the Press Trust of India, founded in 1947, and United News of India (1961). *PAYB*, 1995, p. 28a.

proprietors hire an editor who is accountable to them. It is seldom that a proprietor has cause to complain that "My editor doesn't understand me."

Sub-editors are the hub of a newspaper. At the other end of the spokes, where the rim of the reporting wheel touches the road of society, thousands of would-be writers gratefully work as stringers, observing their communities, taking the perks that come their way and trying to get their start. The novelist R.K. Narayan earned his first fees as a stringer, sending packets of small-town copy to the *Hindu* in Madras in the hope that a few items would be published. "Talkative Man", one of the characters in Narayan's fictional south Indian town of Malgudi, described how it felt to be a stringer:

Those were the days when I was struggling to establish myself as a journalist. They used to call me Universal Correspondent since I had no authority to represent any particular publication. Still, I was busy from morning till night, moving about on my bicycle.[...] I was to be seen here and there, at municipal meetings, magistrates' court, the prize distribution at the Albert Mission, with a reporter's notebook in hand and a fountain pen peeping out of my shirt pocket. I reported all kinds of activities, covering several kilometres a day on my vehicle, and ended at the railway station to post my despatch in the mail van with a late fee – a lot of unwarranted rush, as no news-editor sat fidgeting for my copy at the other end; but I enjoyed my self-appointed role, and felt pleased even if a few lines appeared in print as a space-filler somewhere.¹⁹

Stringers invariably have other sources of income. Talkative Man was quietly living off the remains of a great family's wealth. More often, as we shall see, stringers are teachers, lawyers, shopkeepers and students who derive various benefits, besides payment, from association with a newspaper.

As Narayan's experience of the 1930s indicated, stringers had long been part of news-gathering in India. However, as Indian-language newspapers expanded in the 1980s and sought readers in smaller towns and the countryside, the possibilities for stringers increased. More than English-language newspapers, Indian-language newspapers devoured local copy as they produced local pages and supplements to tap new pools of readers.

Most of the larger newspapers built up small armies of locally based writers "on a string". Sometimes paid a small regular retainer, more often stringers were paid by measuring the space that their copy occupied in the newspaper. From a proprietor's point of view, stringers had immense advantages. They got paid only when they wrote something useful. The newspaper had no responsibility for them – no pension contribution, for example, and no fixed wage. In the early 1990s *Eenadu* claimed

¹⁹ R.K. Narayan, *Talkative Man* (London: Heinemann, 1986), p. 3.

to have a stringer in every *mandal*, the smallest units of local government, totalling more than 1,000 throughout Andhra Pradesh. They were paid expenses and one rupee for every column centimetre of their copy that got into the newspaper. Other Telugu dailies also maintained hundreds of stringers to whom they paid rates varying from 75 paise a column centimetre at *Udayam* to Rs 1.25 at *Andhra Prabha*, the Indian Express' Telugu paper.²⁰ The rates varied – but not much – around the country. *Samaj*, the leading Oriya daily, claimed to pay its 150 stringers Rs 1.50 a column centimetre in 1994.²¹ A column centimetre in the newspaper was thus worth a cup of coffee in the bazaar, and three or four column centimetres bought a kilo of ration-shop rice.

Stringers allowed a newspaper to put down roots in corners that were impossible even for a district-headquarters correspondent to reach regularly. Proprietors often maintained that considerable care was paid to the recruitment and supervision of stringers. "We advertise, they apply, we call them for interview, we speak to them and then we appoint," according to a member of the owning family at *Dainik Jagran* in north India.

We ... have a desk-in-charge ... [who] deals with regional ... [and] district news. It is he who writes regularly ... every day ... to different correspondents: "This you have not done, this you have left." So there is a constant monitoring ... from Kanpur we are writing about twenty to twenty-five letters a day.²²

Managements long recognized that stringers could boost circulation. If you wanted to push your newspaper in a locality, concluded a former general manager of the Indian Express chain, you needed a good stringer, a good distribution agent and a willingness to report on the place.²³

Some newspapers put stringers on commission to sell advertisements (usually 10 per cent of the sale). Other papers scorned the practice because of the implication that clients who bought advertisements received favourable news coverage.²⁴ In Andhra Pradesh networks of stringers were usually supervised by a salaried staff correspondent based in the headquarters town of the district, but stringers filed their copy to their newspaper's nearest production centre. In theory they worked for one paper only, though no doubt the idea of the same person working

²⁰ Interviews, Ch. Emmanuel, Manager, *Eenadu*, Vijayawada, 8 March 1993; V. Vasudeva Deekshitulu, Editor, *Andhra Prabha*, Hyderabad, 12 March 1993; K. Anka Babu, Resident Editor, *Udayam*, Vijayawada, 8 March 1993; Jagdish Prasad Kanuri, Managing Director, *Andhra Jyoti*, Hyderabad, 13 March 1993.

²¹ Interview, K.C. Tripathy, Editor, *Samaj*, Cuttack, 3 January 1994.

²² Interview, Y.M. Gupta, 11 May 1993.

²³ Interview, V. Ranganathan, former General Manager, Indian Express Newspapers, Bombay, 26 April 1993.

²⁴ Interview, K. Anka Babu, *Udayam*, Vijayawada, 8 March 1993.

for two papers under different names must have run through many minds.

In spite of the uncertain pay, a stringer's job was valuable. In Kerala a top stringer with a good territory was said to earn Rs 1,500-Rs 2,000 a month from *Malayala Manorama* in 1993.²⁵ Some newspapers advertised for stringers, interviewed them and made them sit tests. They were on trial for a period of weeks or months, and only then did they get the prize – the press card, which made many things worthwhile:

Journalists [i.e., stringers] in remote areas ... are willing to work for no payment. [...] Those who recruit – “recruit” is not the right word – “enrol” stringers [for a newspaper] ... are paid bribes by the stringers to get the card. [The] ... card is a passport for many things.[...] In a district headquarters, or in a subdivision headquarters, you become the most influential person in that area. You put pressure on district administrators, civil supplies officer, or a BDO [Block Development Officer] or whatever, and you flout your card and make money out of that.²⁶

For those with journalistic ambitions, a stringer's job could lead to a salaried staff position. For others, to be a stringer was a useful addition to one's income and influence. *Prajatantra* in Orissa recruited its stringers from “good professionals” like lawyers, paid their expenses and held seminars twice a year to try to achieve “complete interaction” – “a sort of family affair”, according to the general manager.²⁷

The motives of stringers varied, as did the way in which full-time journalists and proprietors regarded them. Some people became stringers because they wanted full-time jobs as journalists, and some newspapers offered such jobs to productive stringers. Others found that a string to a newspaper complemented work as a teacher, lawyer, merchant or agent. The opportunity to do favours or elicit fear could prove valuable, as could the newspaper's press card and “accreditation from the [state] government”.²⁸ Many full-time journalists believed that stringers ranged from unreliable to downright corrupt, concerned not with news but their own interests. They needed constant supervision. “You need to have a very sharp eye,” a veteran Gujarati journalist contended, “[and even] then it is very difficult to [know] what is a PR job and what is the news” emanating from stringers.²⁹ The principal of *Eenadu's* School of Journalism in Hyderabad, whose job was to improve the standard

²⁵ Interview, P. Gopi, Chief Correspondent, *Malayala Manorama*, Cannanore, 4 April 1993.

²⁶ Interview, S.P. Singh, 21 February 1993.

²⁷ Interview, P.K. Sahoo, General Manager, *Prajatantra*, Cuttack, 1 January 1994.

²⁸ Interview, Y.M. Gupta, Marketing Director, *Dainik Jagran*, Kanpur, 11 May 1993.

²⁹ Interview, Vijay Sanghvi, 9 May 1993.

of that newspaper's reporting, concluded that "controlling them is very difficult. Because these fellows, honestly speaking, most ... are Class One blackmailers."³⁰

The line between a stringer and a staffer could blur – a stringer could become a "full-time part-timer" with a defined territory or beat.³¹ Substantial newspapers kept at least one salaried correspondent in each district-headquarters town in their region, and a stringer might aspire to such a job and its advantages in payment and security.

Full-time, salaried reporters – "staffers" – provided the backbone of a newspaper's news-gathering. In daily touch with the paper's production centre, reporters based in the districts were responsible for knowing what stories affected the people of their locality and covering those stories more effectively than their rivals. An able staff correspondent in a district town was expected to know about everything from the price of onions to the private lives of MLAs. At the production centre of a newspaper, a number of reporters would be organized under a "chief of staff" or "news editor" to cover events of the day and particular "rounds" or "beats" – police, courts, markets, etc.

Such an establishment of staff reporters would turn up stories to interest readers; but staff reporters and their stories could be expensive and troublesome. They could turn up more news than a judicious proprietor might wish to know about. Some newspapers got by with as few staffers as possible. The *Maharashtra Times*, the Mumbai-based Marathi daily of Bennett Coleman, had only "seven or eight" reporters in the early 1990s, plus sports and business writers and a dozen copy editors.³² *Punjab Kesari* in Jalandhar was produced by a large number of copy editors and stringers but only half a dozen staff reporters.³³

For writers infected with the zeal that sometimes surrounds journalism, to be a staffer provided the time, security and support to investigate controversial stories. A "haunted house" in Pune, the subject of much local credulity and speculation in the 1980s, got "un-haunted" when an award-winning staffer on *Loksatta*, the Marathi daily of the Indian Express chain, had the time to investigate and expose the claims.³⁴ The joys of a group of pesky young reporters at *Deepika* in Kottayam in the early 1990s derived from the fact that although they were not well paid, they were on salary and worked as a team. Coordinating their

³⁰ Interview, Dr Boodaraju Radhakrishna, Principal, Eenadu School of Journalism, Hyderabad, 4 March 1993.

³¹ Interview, P. Gopi, Cannanore, 4 April 1993.

³² Interview, Govind Talwalkar, Editor, *Maharashtra Times*, Mumbai, 27 April 1993.

³³ Interview, Vijay Kumar Chopra, Chief Editor, Hind Samachar Group, Jalandhar, 20 May 1993.

³⁴ Interview, Arun Khore, Chief Reporter, *Loksatta*, Pune, 18 March 1993.

activities from the newspaper's headquarters each day, they were in a position to press copy editors to print their stories.³⁵ If they stirred up criticism, they supported each other and were much harder to dismiss than a stringer.

A newspaper's commitment to news is reflected in the number, quality and conditions of its staff reporters, and these characteristics varied widely among Indian-language newspapers. This leads to a related question, examined later in this chapter: is it possible to cover the full range of a society's issues if large sections of society are almost totally absent from reporting and editing staffs? I refer of course to women and Dalits, as we shall see.

Successful reporters might aspire to become editors or to get promotions that would take them to the state capital and perhaps to advantages like the subsidized government housing often reserved for senior journalists. However, it was uncommon for a reporter on an Indian-language newspaper to move to an English-language publication. (Television opened up new possibilities: Hindi editors like S. P. Singh and Mrinal Pande became widely known TV news presenters.)³⁶

The next layers in the news-gathering process lay at the production centre where the newspaper was printed. Multi-centred newspapers like *Eenadu* and *Malayala Manorama* exercised varying degrees of control from headquarters in Hyderabad and Kottayam. But for stringers and reporters, the decisions affecting their copy were made by copy-editors and "deskmen" (and a very few women) at the production centres. For stringers especially, getting copy into the paper was important: no publication, no pay.

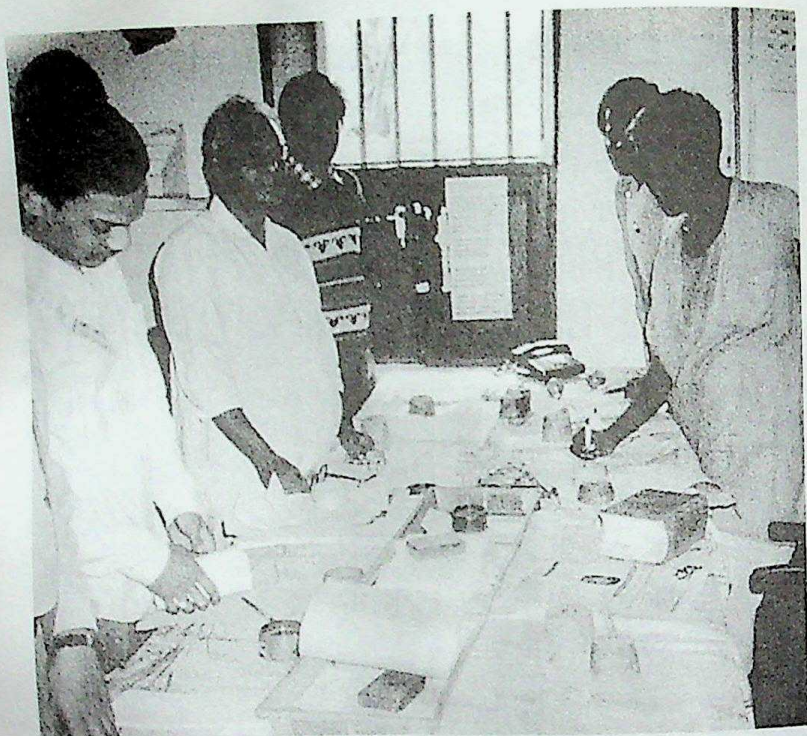
Around the English-speaking world, it is a common conviction among journalists that copy desks are staffed by sub-editors dedicated to the manufacture of error and murder of prose. Such convictions are often reciprocated: copy-editors may see reporters as lazy, careless and semi-literate. Such prejudices highlight the different requirements of the two jobs: the copy desk builds a newspaper out of the stone quarried by reporters. Both sides work under different pressures and have different advantages. Reporters are more their own bosses, yet they may have to work irregular hours and risk danger. Sub-editors, on the other hand, experience close supervision and the tense tyranny of press deadlines. They have predictable hours, but they usually work at night because all major Indian-language dailies publish in the morning.

A deskman or woman on an Indian-language newspaper worked

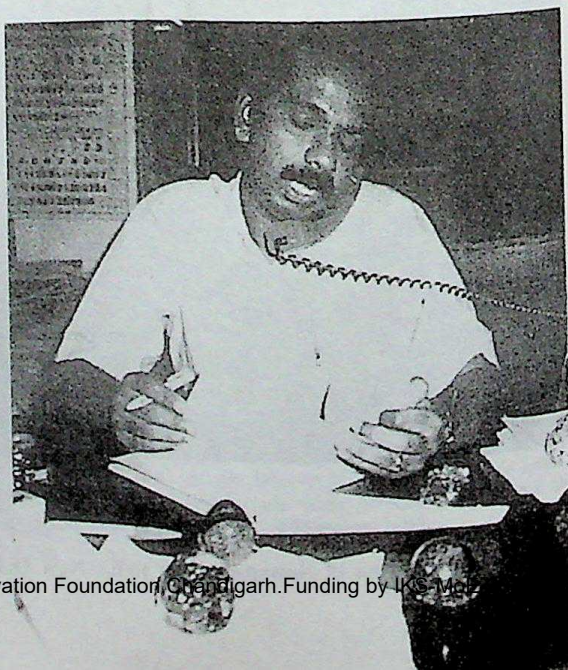
³⁵ Interview, Jose T. Thomas, News Editor, *Deepika*, Kottayam, 12 April 1993.

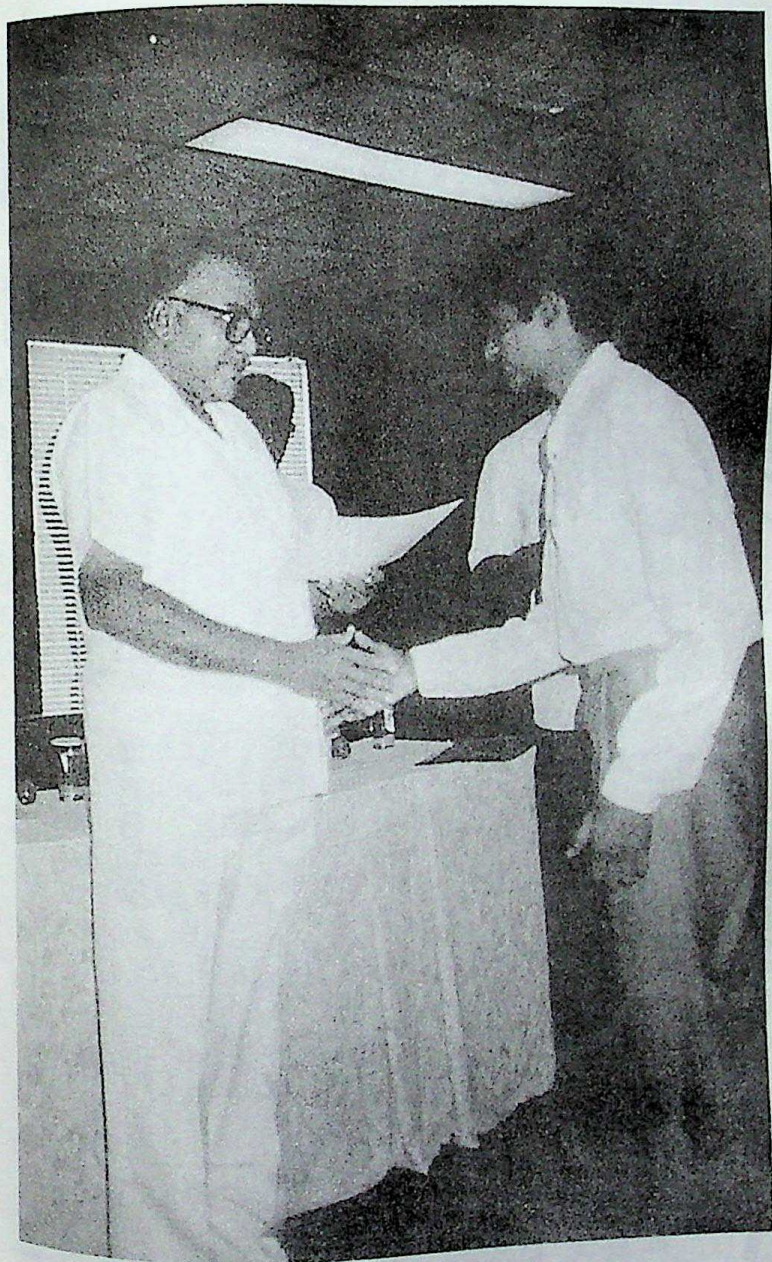
³⁶ *IT*, 7 July 1997, p. 1, obituary of S. P. Singh. Interview, S.P. Singh, New Delhi, 21 February 1993. Mrinal Pande proved a popular television presenter, but found the television environment taxing. Interview, New Delhi, 8 February 1999.



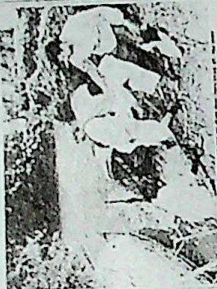


Above, newsdesk, *Prajatantra*, Cuttack, January 1994. Below, news editor, Jose Panachipuram, *Malayala Manorama*, Kottayam, April 1993.





Ramaji Rao, proprietor of *Eenadu*, presents certificates at a graduation ceremony of the Weasimigam Digital Preservation Foundation, March, 1993
CC-0 Agam Paper's School of Journalism, Chandigarh. Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant



Herald
Herald
 The Herald is a daily newspaper published in the city of New York. It contains news, sports, and entertainment sections. The paper is known for its comprehensive coverage of local and international events.

המחלקה הכלכלית והמסחרית
המחלקה הכלכלית והמסחרית

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1944-1945

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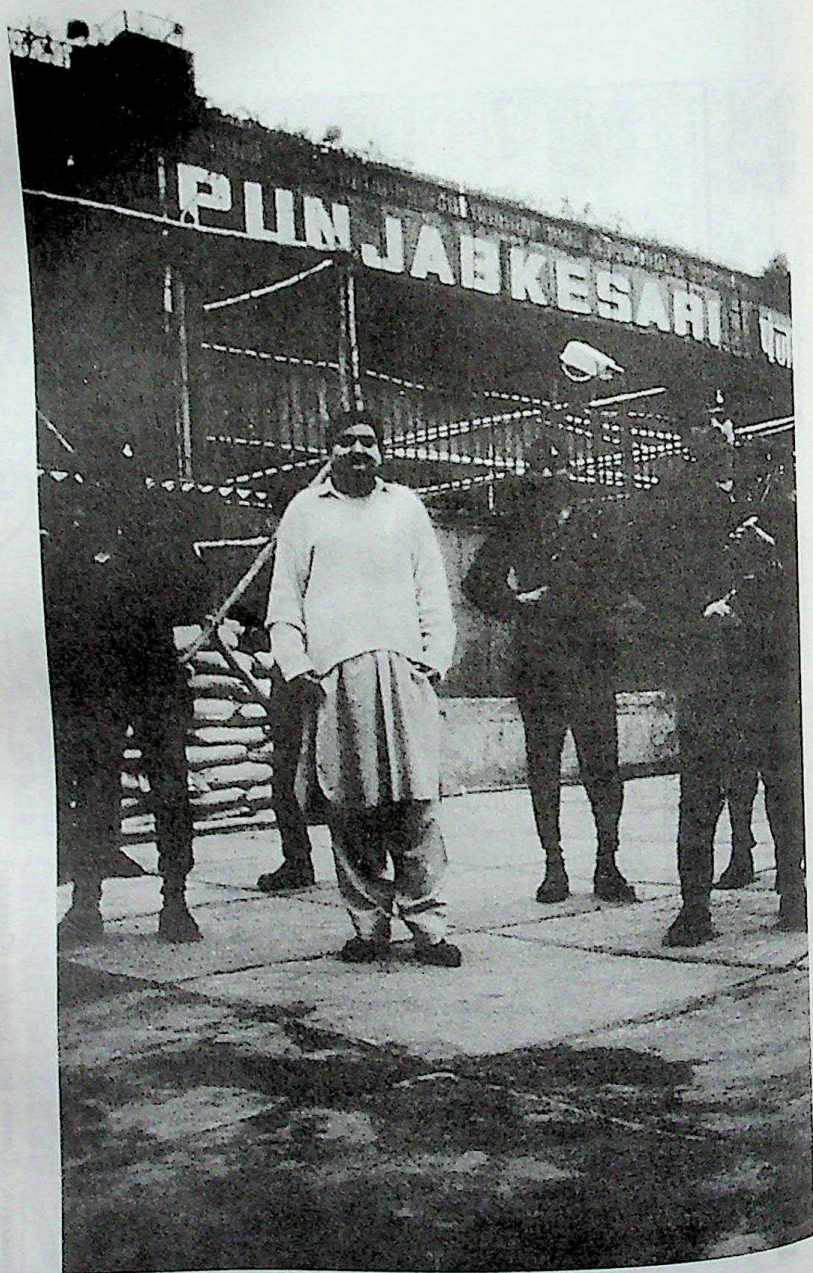
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Ashwini Kumar, part-owner and Delhi editor of *Punjab Kesari*, with his bodyguard, January 1994.

under the double pressure of having to be both a sub-editor and a translator as copy moved among various languages. On a fairly typical night in 1993, Bimal Maheshwari, news editor of *Samakaleen*, the Indian Express' Gujarati daily in Mumbai (circulation 39,000 in 1993), handled stories in four languages – English, Hindi, Marathi and Gujarati. Indian Express reporters and news services supplied all the stories, and Maheshwari's job was to assign them to one of ten sub-editors to translate into Gujarati and edit to a specified length. The previous day an Indian Airlines plane had crashed at Nagpur, killing most of the passengers. A sub-editor asked for a translation for "grounding", since one of the questions about the crash was whether the plane should have flown or been "grounded". Maheshwari replied with a Gujarati translation, but explained that they also commonly used English terms such as "grounding". The goal was to convey the meaning in the simplest intelligible way.³⁷ Every night thousands of sub-editors around India played small parts in homogenizing languages – transforming varied, regional styles of speech into printed, mass languages.

Sub-editors had responsibility without a great deal of security. They could get a newspaper into trouble by the headlines they wrote and the way they treated stories. In spite of the rulings of labour boards and some unionization, their guarantee of employment was usually weak. They had to gauge a proprietor's wishes, yet not go overboard in pandering to them and thereby bring the Press Council, the law or a mob to the newspaper's door. If they did, they knew that they, not the proprietor, would face the worst consequences.

The conditions in which sub-editors worked were often bleak and regimented. The newsroom at *Punjab Kesari* in Jalandhar turned out three dailies each night – *Punjab Kesari* in Hindi, *Hind Samachar* in Urdu and *Jag Bani* in Punjabi. The news editor, a long-time employee of the Chopra family, owners of the Hind Samachar company, sat on a raised dais, like a chief clerk in a Dickensian novel, presiding over forty or more sub-editors working in four languages. The proprietors sought to keep the number of sub-editors to a minimum because they believed that overstaffing reduced efficiency by encouraging gossiping. Discipline was strict: an unsanctioned day off was punished by the loss of a second day's pay.³⁸ Although the news editor ruled the non-air-conditioned newsroom, a vast gulf separated him from the Chopra family. The three newspapers maintained large desks which exchanged copy constantly. A single reporter or stringer covered a locality or a beat for all three dailies, and a sizeable proportion of copy came from

³⁷ Interview, Bimal Maheshwari, News Editor, *Samakaleen*, Bombay, 27 April 1993.

³⁸ Interview, Amit Chopra, Director – Production, Hind Samachar Group, Jalandhar, 20 May 1993.

agencies, syndication and various English-language publications.³⁹ Avinash Chopra, the family member in charge of sales, was also a joint-editor – a great advantage, he said, in being able to make quick decisions, based on reactions from hawkers and agents, about the newspapers' content.⁴⁰ A rival editor ridiculed *Punjab Kesari* for using hawkers to collect photographs and news.⁴¹

The dynamics of the newsroom at Hind Samachar illustrated essential aspects of newspaper production. People producing the newspaper influenced what got into print; but their bosses, who also had views on what the newspaper should be saying, were adept at getting their views into the newspaper. The vigilant, dependable news editor, presiding over the newsroom from his elevated perch, was one way. Regular adjustment of the newspaper's content, based on discussions between owner-editors and sales agents, was another.

At *Dainik Jagran*, the Hindi daily based in Kanpur, the scene in the newsroom was similar. In 1993 P.K. Sharma, a long-serving assistant editor, presided over seven separate desks for different editions and tasks, each with four or five people assigned to it. Sharma's job was to represent the editor-proprietor, Narendra Mohan, who would drop in for discussions and consult by telephone about major headlines and treatment of news. Sharma occupied a small, non-air-conditioned, glassed "cabin" with a 1960 map of the world covering a portion of a once-white-washed wall. Newsroom equipment was limited to laminex tables, cane chairs and writing boards in the laps of the sub-editors. Air-conditioning was restricted to the computer rooms. A few pin-ups of film stars and signs in Hindi warning workers not to spit *pan*, covered small portions of the flaking whitewash on the walls. Lighting came from fluorescent tubes on the ceiling.⁴² It was difficult to sense that in such spartan conditions sub-editors experienced much of the "glamour" that Bhupinder Tiwari, a senior sub-editor at *Dainik Jagran* in Kanpur, said had led him into journalism in the early 1980s.⁴³

Glamour and recognized influence belonged to senior editors and, still more, to owner-editors. Members of the Chopra family at Hind Samachar, and the Gupta family at *Dainik Jagran*, enjoyed the deference both of their employees and of outsiders seeking the newspaper's favour. Such working proprietors – the Kandathil family at *Malayala Manorama*

³⁹ Interview, Vijay Kumar Chopra, 20 May 1993.

⁴⁰ Interview, Avinash Chopra, Joint Editor and Director – Sales, Hind Samachar Group, Jalandhar, 21 May 1993.

⁴¹ "Who's Afraid of Hindi Journalism?", *Vidura* (June 1992), pp. 12, 16.

⁴² Interview, P.K. Sharma, Assistant Editor, *Dainik Jagran*, Kanpur, 12 May 1993.

⁴³ Interview, Bhupinder Tiwari, sub-editor, *Dainik Jagran*, Kanpur, 12 May 1993.

or Ramoji Rao at *Eenadu* were other examples – often put their names to editorials and regular columns as well as overseeing the finances of the newspaper.

Owner-editors were sometimes ridiculed and deplored as crass capitalists wishing to enjoy not only profits but literary prestige too.⁴⁴ An old foe of Ramoji Rao asserted that the owner of *Eenadu*, though incapable of writing anything for himself, revelled in having the paper carry his signed editorials, written by someone else.⁴⁵ Laments were common for lost, golden days when independent editors, left alone by enlightened proprietors, wrote fine prose and uplifted fellow citizens.⁴⁶ Yet evidence from elsewhere suggested that the myth of the independent editor and the golden age was part of the saga of newspapers everywhere, not something specific to Indian-language dailies. “Especially since the 1870s”, Jurgen Habermas generalized about European and American newspapers, “the publisher appoints editors in the expectation that they will do as they are told in the private interest of a profit-oriented exercise.”⁴⁷ The paymasters of the piper had always got the tunes they wanted, including, if they were so minded, a turn on the pipes. The way power was exercised in the newsrooms of Indian-language dailies was neither unique nor new.

Standing

Though barren newsrooms characterized many Indian-language dailies in the 1990s, the status of journalists, editors and proprietors had grown substantially during the newspaper revolution of the previous twenty years. Until the late 1980s, especially in north India, Indian-language journalists often believed they were treated as everyone’s inferior – inferior to English-language journalists, to business people of comparable experience and to the owners of the newspapers for whom they worked. In 1965 Punjabi journalists complained that when arrested, they were consigned to “C” class in the jails, the lowest category of prisoner, yet “considering the profession of journalism, at least ‘B’ class should be given.”⁴⁸ An editor five years later complained that poor pay attracted

⁴⁴ Ashokaji, “What’s Wrong with the Hindi Press?”, *Vidura*, vol. 3, no. 6 (May 1966), p. 3.

⁴⁵ Interview, A.B.K. Prasad, Managing Director, ABK Publications Ltd., Hyderabad, 6 March 1993.

⁴⁶ George, *Provincial Press*, p. 53.

⁴⁷ Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, p. 186. See also Stephen Kors, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain: the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), p. 8.

⁴⁸ Report...*Small Newspapers*, p. 49.

poor recruits: "If I am an adult and not declared insane, I can be a journalist."⁴⁹ Reflecting on higher-status, English-language journalism, Rahul Singh agreed: "If you knocked at the doors of journalism in India in 1963 ..., most people thought you were either very foolish or a little crazy."⁵⁰

Poor pay was the most obvious reason why journalists so regarded themselves. Sub-editors and reporters on English-language newspapers started on about one-third of the salary of contemporaries in a private company. On Indian-language newspapers the new journalist "got even less". Rahul Singh recalled being paid about Rs 300 a month as a young journalist in the early 1960s when he worked for the better-paying English-language newspapers.⁵¹ An editor in provincial India reckoned that the salaries for newcomers in the late 1960s were "about Rs 150 or Rs 175", at a time when a high-school teacher drew Rs 450.⁵² M. J. Akbar recalled salaries "between Rs 325 and Rs 375" at the *Times of India* in Mumbai in 1971.⁵³

Low wages and insecure employment often typified the conditions of Indian-language journalists. A keen sense of lower status accompanied such conditions. Indian-language newspapers, concluded one observer, were "treated with the insolence-tinged sympathy one generally reserves for country cousins".⁵⁴ Such attitudes were more pronounced in north India where newspapers in Hindi, though it was the national language, were only beginning in the 1990s to demonstrate their political efficacy. In the four southern states, each with its own language, politicians and administrators much earlier discovered the influence of the local-language press. To be sure, literacy rates in Kerala and Tamil Nadu had long been higher than in north India. But the literacy rate in 1991 in Telugu-speaking Andhra Pradesh (44 per cent) was only slightly better than that in Hindi-speaking Uttar Pradesh (42 per cent), yet Telugu and Urdu journalists in Andhra Pradesh were more assured of their status and position than their equivalents in U.P.⁵⁵

Why were perceptions of status different? Payment and conditions were part of an explanation. Journalists working for Hindi-language

⁴⁹ S.N. Ghosh, editor of the *Pioneer*, Lucknow, in Mankekar (ed.), *What Ails the Indian Press?*, p. 40.

⁵⁰ *Indian Express Magazine*, 16 October 1988, p. 1

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² S.N. Ghosh in Mankekar, *What Ails the Indian Press?*, p. 49. Rs 450 a month was an average at the high school in Chandigarh where I taught in 1967-9.

⁵³ *Afternoon Despatch and Courier*, 1 July 1997 [<http://www.afternooncd.com/news/akbar.htm>]

⁵⁴ Yogesh Sharma in *Onlooker*, 16-31 August 1981, p. 9.

⁵⁵ Literacy in Andhra Pradesh in 1991 was 44 per cent; in Uttar Pradesh, 42 per cent.

newspapers were often poorly paid and looked after, even in comparison to colleagues in south India. Moreover, their proximity to Delhi increased awareness of the disparities between themselves and people working for English-language newspapers. The proximity to Delhi also enhanced the apparent importance of “national” news, “national” English-language newspapers and the English-speaking “national” elite. Hindi seemed to suffer in comparison.

Contrast this with Andhra Pradesh. Hyderabad, the capital, was thirty hours by rail from Delhi. Although Hyderabad’s Muslim connections meant that Urdu was still a prominent language in the city, the politics of Andhra Pradesh were conducted in Telugu, including the politics of the legislature and a good deal of the administration. To the majority of Telugu-speakers, theirs was a language that delivered political goods – state-based goods at any rate. Elections, education and administration were conducted in Telugu. In the Hindi-speaking states, on the other hand, there was a far stronger sense, which waned rapidly only in the 1990s, that much big political business was done in English and that New Delhi and its English-speaking bureaucrats and politicians were too meddlingly close for comfort.⁵⁶

Two factors produced and reinforced this sense: levels of literacy and the way in which proprietors conducted their business. In Kerala, Tamil Nadu and even Karnataka, literacy had been higher for longer than in Hindi-speaking areas. Politicians knew that the majority of voters could – and did – read. Because media consumption was higher in the south, the people who made the media – even print journalists – were better known, understood and regarded.

On the second point, some proprietors ran their newspapers differently. *Eenadu* in Telugu, *Malayala Manorama* and *Mathrubhumi* in Malayalam, even the stodgy *Prajavani* in Kannada and the spectacular *Thanthi* in Tamil had proprietors who sought to import the most effective techniques of international journalism and newspaper production. This was also true of newspapers like *Ananda Bazar Patrika* in West Bengal and *Sakal* in Maharashtra. In Bengali the Calcutta-dominated readership was assumed to be more sophisticated than readers of Hindi dailies in rural Uttar Pradesh. Aveek Sarkar, editor of *Ananda Bazar Patrika* and a member of the owning family, was himself trained on British newspapers and enjoyed recounting his tutelage under Harold Evans of the *Sunday Times* (and later the *New York Daily News*).⁵⁷ Similarly, the younger members of the Kandathil family of *Malayala Manorama*

⁵⁶ The fact that the southern states escaped the worst excesses of Sanjay Gandhi’s “family planning” enthusiasm during the “emergency” in 1975-7 is evidence supporting this argument.

⁵⁷ Coleridge, *Paper Tigers*, pp. 216-17.

trained in Britain in programs sponsored by the Thomson Foundation. Malayalis – the people of Kerala – had been the most literate and politically involved people in India for more than a century, and Kerala proprietors judged that polished production and design were essential to retain readers. In Telugu, *Eenadu's* founder Ramoji Rao honed an intense love of newspapers during an apprenticeship in advertising in Delhi in the 1950s and early 1960s. The fact that he sent his son to the William Allen White School of Journalism in Manhattan, Kansas, symbolized the appreciation of many Indian-language proprietors for international newspaper models.⁵⁸ Such interest in journalism was less evident among proprietors of the big Hindi dailies of north India. They invariably showed keen eyes for costs but less relish for production standards, training or amenities.

The status of Indian-language newspapers – a nagging question for stringers, reporters and sub-editors – also affected editors and proprietors. For them too it began with money. The big English-language newspapers till the 1980s commanded the advertising revenues, as well as influence with politicians, senior bureaucrats and great capitalists. Hindi editors sensed discrimination most keenly. Narendra Mohan, editor of *Dainik Jagran* for more than thirty years, said in 1993:

[The] “language” press in India, especially [the] “language” press of north India, still does not command the respectability of the political god-fathers and bureaucracy. The bureaucracy ... do not attach much importance to the language press. For them it is still the English press [that] is ... [the] very, very vital source of information or ... communication. They still live in those old British days ...

Narendra Mohan believed that editors of Urdu newspapers in Pakistan had higher standing than people like himself in India.

Jagran is the biggest newspaper, and you are talking to the editor of *Jagran*, and I can say from my experience that I do not command that respect or that prestige ... [that a Pakistani editor would].

He believed that “now the trend is changing”, but that nevertheless there was

a caste system in journalism. Those who belong to [the] “language” press ... are considered to be a lower-caste people, and those who are in the English press they are ... supposed to be upper-caste people. So the caste-mindedness, the caste division, exists in the Indian print media.⁵⁹

Narendra Mohan's view was widely held. “Treated like poor relations” was one characterization of Indian-language newspapers, especially

⁵⁸ William Allen White (1868-1944) was the legendary editor of a great small-town American daily, the *Emporia Gazette*.

⁵⁹ Interview, Narendra Mohan, Editor, *Dainik Jagran*, Kanpur, 11 May 1993.

Hindi ones.⁶⁰ “Inadequate funding”, wrote Mrinal Pande, one of the few women to have become a senior editor, “is the first signal to the language press of its inferiority.”⁶¹

Yet by the 1990s these circumstances had begun to change. First, Indian-language newspapers captured a major share of advertising expenditure as middle-class, monied, marketing India recognized that these newspapers had vast pools of readers and influence. Secondly and relatedly, politicians began to calculate that Indian-language newspapers had real power because they entered the lives of many more voters than English-language newspapers did. Editors like Narendra Mohan put this argument constantly:

Those people who live in Delhi ... are ... influenced by [the] English press. And that ... was the reason why Nehru miscalculated about India and failed miserably. That is ... the reason why Mrs Gandhi miscalculated about India and lost the election. That is what Rajiv Gandhi did – he lost the election.[...] If you want to know India ..., you can only know India through the language press.⁶²

Politicians began to respond to such cautionary tales and to recognize the necessity of wooing Indian-language newspapers, even Hindi newspapers.

Ashwini Kumar, New Delhi editor of *Punjab Kesari*, the largest selling Hindi daily in the 1990s, was both surprised and jubilant, as we saw in Chapter 5, at the changed attitude of power-holders. “He [the Prime Minister] was trying to convince me! ... the politicians never used to do this sort of thing with Hindi editors.”⁶³ In 1970 a veteran journalist asserted that officials read only the English-language press and that even major stories were “rarely taken notice of” if they appeared in Hindi newspapers.⁶⁴ The most notorious example was of the Hindi freelancer early in 1984 who could not get his exposé of Union Carbide’s factory in Bhopal published in an English-language newspaper. Although the story appeared before the disaster of December 1984, it appeared in a Hindi daily, and “people who matter in Delhi or Bhopal seldom read Hindi dailies.”⁶⁵

From the late 1980s, however, *Punjab Kesari* became required reading for New Delhi’s politicians and ambitious bureaucrats. So, at least,

⁶⁰ K.N. Sud in *Hindustan Times*, 26 May 1975 (Janmabhoomi library, Mumbai, clippings files).

⁶¹ Mrinal Pande, “Media Scene: Is the Grass Green?”, *Mainstream*, 2 April 1988, p. 23.

⁶² Interview, Narendra Mohan, 11 May 1993.

⁶³ Interview, Ashwini Kumar, Resident Editor, *Punjab Kesari*, New Delhi, 6 May 1993.

⁶⁴ J.P. Chaturvedi in Mankekar, *What Ails?*, pp.69-70.

⁶⁵ Mrinal Pande, *The Subject Is Woman* (New Delhi: Sanchar Publishing House, 1991), p. 23.

Ashwini Kumar believed on the basis of conversations with senior politicians and civil servants:

The Prime Minister gets all the papers and ... [the] first thing he does is he opens up the *Punjab Kesari* and he reads it, "Oh, accha, thik hai" [good, it's okay]. [...] Then he goes to the *Navbharat Times*. Then he goes to another Hindi paper. Then he comes to English. And I also see when I go to the parliament and meet the MPs, ... the ministers, the opposition leaders ... almost everybody reads the paper.⁶⁶

Such confidence represented an immense change from the lamentations of Hindi journalists and proprietors in the 1960s and 1970s.

The nature of a newspaper entwines capitalism and political power. Politicians and bureaucrats began to treat Indian-language newspapers seriously only after those newspapers started to win a large share of advertisements and to expand. "If advertisers, who carry out readership surveys and hire marketeers, think these newspapers are important", politicians and bureaucrats seemed to think, "then there must be something in it. We must pay more attention to these editors and reporters."

This sequence – perceived financial muscle leading to political respect – was not the only way the process could occur. In Kerala, India's leading state in newspaper consumption, political involvement and newspapers grew together and preceded widespread consumerism and advertising by a generation or more. Kerala in the 1960s had newspaper penetration, as we have seen, that India as a whole began to achieve only in the mid-1990s. In Kerala there was a respectable career to be made in journalism at least from the 1960s.

P. Gopi, the chief correspondent of the Cannanore office of *Malayala Manorama*, followed such a path. It may not have been typical, but it was certainly possible. Gopi began on an evening daily in Calicut, became a stringer for *Deepika*, the Catholic-run daily based in Kottayam, was recruited by *Mathrubhumi* and after nearly five years there was "invited" to *Malayala Manorama* with a better offer in 1965. "I was very hard-working," he said, and *Malayala Manorama* was trying to build circulation in north Kerala, as we saw in Chapter 4. In Kerala, Gopi said, drawing on his thirty-five-year experience as a salaried staff correspondent in a small town, Malayalam journalists were never treated as second-class citizens.⁶⁷

The standing of Indian-language newspapers grew as political elites – politicians and bureaucrats – recognized that these newspapers had influence. In Kerala that recognition emerged from closely fought political battles in a literate society. Advertisers then discovered that

⁶⁶ Interview, Ashwini Kumar, Resident Editor, *Punjab Kesari*, New Delhi, 6 May 1993.

⁶⁷ Interview, P. Gopi, Chief Correspondent, *Malayala Manorama*, Cannanore, 4 April 1993.

these well-circulated, widely read Malayalam newspapers provided a way of marketing products. In north India, however, the recognition came in another way: advertisers in the 1980s, keen to reach small-town and rural markets, increasingly used Hindi newspapers. Once such newspapers began to look more prosperous – colour printing may have had a far wider impact than we will ever be able to measure – and circulate more widely, their editors and journalists began to receive greater deference and consideration.

Training

“Their resident editors are managers,” S.P. Singh, a former editor of *Navbharat Times*, said of Hindi newspapers in 1992. “Their correspondents are touts. Their part-time correspondents are irresponsible.”⁶⁸ The recruiting and training of Indian-language journalists varied considerably from one language to another, and a general sense that better-trained journalists brought advantages to their employers grew only slowly. “Training”, moreover, could mean exactly that: journalists “trained” to know what their proprietors wanted, not necessarily journalists better able to deal with ethical questions, overcome obstacles, and write strong, straight stories.

Neither *Dainik Jagran* nor *Punjab Kesari* trained journalists formally. “We don’t have a training [program],” said Ashwini Kumar of *Punjab Kesari*;

We can afford to get the people from other newspapers, because we are the largest [Hindi newspaper] in the country, and we can afford to pay more. So ... for the last four or five years, our policy is [a] little different. We are getting people from other smaller newspapers, and they think that they can get more pay here, and they have got experience. We just have a look at their bio-datas and see if they have got four ... or five years’ experience in that organization. Then we feel that this man can work here. But still we then give them six months’ probation, then another six months’ probation and after one year then we confirm their appointment...⁶⁹

No Hindi daily appeared to run a formal training program. The English-language press was not so very different. The *Times of India* abandoned attempts to run a school of journalism because it doubted the benefits and disliked the cost.⁷⁰

At *Eenadu*, the Telugu daily, a more active attitude about training prevailed. Ramoji Rao not only had one of his sons study journalism at the William Allen White School, he started *Eenadu*’s own School

⁶⁸ “Who’s Afraid of Hindi Journalism?”, *Vidura* (June 1992), pp. 12, 16.

⁶⁹ Interview, Ashwini Kumar, Resident Editor, *Punjab Kesari*, New Delhi, 6 May 1993.

⁷⁰ Interview, S.P. Singh, 21 February 1993.

of Journalism in the early 1990s. Students accepted for the six-month course received a monthly allowance of Rs 800. Graduates were assigned to *Eenadu* centres around the state on probationary salaries of Rs 1,500, which rose to Rs 2,400 if they were eventually confirmed in the job. There were complaints about the quality of the applicants, and *Eenadu* also looked for journalists who had proved their ability in other ways. In the new Rajahmundry centre in 1993, for example, P. Srinivasa Rao, who was in charge of twenty staff members, 100 stringers and all aspects of news, began his career with *Eenadu* as a teletype operator. Encouraged by a journalist to submit stories, he was eventually hired as a staff reporter. After running a district daily from the Vijayawada centre, he was surprised to be appointed to supervise the new operation in Rajahmundry, even though he was still only in his late twenties.⁷¹

Some training was important if newspapers were to stay out of trouble with governments and angry citizens. Hindi dailies provided examples of the unnecessary strife that overzealous, undertrained gatekeepers could produce. In its coverage of the rioting following the BJP's first march to Ayodhya in 1990, *Aj* on 2 November 1990 reported widely varying death counts in its various, poorly coordinated editions: 100 dead in the Varanasi and Agra editions, 200 dead in the Kanpur edition, 400-500 dead and injured in the Ranchi edition, and 500 in the Bareilly edition. Early in December its Agra edition put a totally false story on its front page: that Hindu patients in the hospital at Aligarh Muslim University had been killed, implicitly by Muslim medical staff. The Press Council censured four Hindi dailies, including *Aj*, for these and other flagrant errors.⁷² A senior member of *Aj* explained the management's attitude:

Some of our editors, particularly [the] one [of the] Agra edition, he printed a bad headline – an unsupported headline – that so many people were murdered in Aligarh.[...] It was unconfirmed news. That matter was taken up by the Press Council, and they condemned us. The Press Council unfortunately hasn't got any [sentence stops] – they may just pass a resolution condemning – the beginning and end is there – no further. And I think it is good for the freedom of the press that it should be left to the proprietors and editors [in this way]. We ourselves discussed and condemned that editor... Editors enjoy independence, and they were just carried away by that prevailing atmosphere. At the head office we didn't like it.⁷³

Poorly trained journalists, trying to put out a newspaper that would sell, had long found riots a temptation.⁷⁴ For proprietors, "effective

⁷¹ Interview, P. Srinivasa Rao, General Newsdesk-in-Charge, *Eenadu*, Rajahmundry, 9 March 1993.

⁷² *Press Council of India Review*, vol. 12, no. 3 (July 1991), pp. 122-5.

⁷³ Interview, V. Prasad, Director Development, *Aj* Group of Newspapers, Varanasi, 11 January 1994.

⁷⁴ S.P. Singh in "Who's Afraid of Hindi Journalism?", *Vidura* (June 1992), p. 17.

training" would enable journalists to judge proprietors' wishes accurately, carry them out subtly and avoid blatant inaccuracy and contradiction. From a proprietor's point of view, the best journalists were both skilled and dependent.

Most proprietors and managers in the early 1990s still believed that the best training for journalists was on the job. University-based journalism courses, of which there were more than two dozen, excluding various institutes offering certificates,⁷⁵ were not highly regarded. Such proprietorial consensus about the benefits of on-the-job training made sense. It allowed a management to sample a person's talents before making a commitment. It discouraged journalists from getting overblown ideas about the importance of their profession. And it helped to obscure where a journalist might fit into the wage scales laid down by national wage-setting panels.

At the same time, however, some politicians and newspaper people recognized that the training and conditioning of journalists had crucial consequences. In 1990, the Bharatiya Janata Party government of Madhya Pradesh set up a National University of Journalism in Bhopal. N.K. Trikha, the first head of the Faculty of Journalism, deplored the fact that when they began, there was not a single book in Hindi worth using in a journalism course. A former editor of the Lucknow edition of *Navbharat Times*, Bennett Coleman's Hindi daily, Trikha's goal was to train Hindi journalists in Hindi.⁷⁶

Institutions like the National University of Journalism and *Eenadu's* School of Journalism served both idealism and self-interest. People such as Trikha and Ramoji Rao could talk of the need to improve the quality and skills of young journalists so that they could more effectively practise an honourable profession. But such training also produced journalists who understood and worked efficiently within the realities of a great newspaper like *Eenadu*. If the newspaper accepted, trained and hired you, you might be expected both to feel indebted to, and stand a little in awe of, the newspaper. Similarly, a political party like the BJP, which often proclaimed that "pseudo-secular" enemies dominated the English-language press, corrected its identified the growing importance of Hindi-language newspapers. Indeed the BJP's forerunner, the Jana Sangh, had established a reputation in the 1960s for "the most readable newspapers in Hindi", which had "a sense of mission" and whose journalists "took interest in their work".⁷⁷ By the 1990s, the BJP sought

⁷⁵ PAYB, 1995, pp. 32a-36a.

⁷⁶ Interview, N.K. Trikha, Head, Faculty of Journalism, National University of Journalism (Bhopal), Hyderabad, 1 March 1993. The course produced its first graduates in 1992; seventeen out of twenty were said to have got newspaper jobs.

⁷⁷ George, *Provincial Press*, p. 53.

to use “modern” methods of journalistic education to create genuinely “Indian” journalists to work on as many newspapers as possible. Well-trained gatekeepers might be expected to influence any newspaper they produced.

However, two categories of Indians were notably underrepresented among the gatekeepers: Dalits and women.

Dalits

“Dalit” refers to the 15 per cent of Indians classified as “Scheduled Castes” – once referred to as “untouchables” in English or as “Harijans”, the coined word of Mahatma Gandhi.⁷⁸ To practise untouchability – to discriminate against anyone on the basis of caste – was prohibited by the constitution of 1950. Laws were enacted to punish such discrimination, and a system of “positive discrimination” set aside seats in legislatures, jobs in government service and places in schools and colleges solely for members of Scheduled Castes.

By the 1990s, however, improvements in Dalits’ standard of living or level of respect were meagre. Although 37 per cent of Dalits were literate (it had been 10 per cent at independence in 1947), the comparable percentage for other Indians was almost 60. In Hindi-speaking Bihar, Dalit literacy was less than 20 per cent and literacy among Dalit women was 7 per cent.⁷⁹ Statements from high-caste proprietors about “those who belong to [the] ‘language’ press” being “a lower-caste people” – in comparison to the “Brahmins” of the English-language press – take on a grim irony in the light of the experiences of millions of Dalits.

Although Dalits numbered close to 150 million people in the 1990s, almost none worked on daily newspapers as reporters or sub-editors. There were no Dalit editors and no Dalit-run dailies. Dalit periodicals, where they existed, were fringe publications, often with a literary emphasis and with limited influence beyond the circle that produced them. The most senior Dalit journalist I met in more than ten years of studying Indian newspapers had never worked for a commercially run daily.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ The term “Dalit” is also sometimes used more widely to include all poor people, even those among non-Scheduled Castes, and even poor Muslims. I use it here to refer only to Scheduled Castes.

⁷⁹ *Dalit International Newsletter*, vol. 2, no. 2 (June 1997), p. 9. *Statistical Outline of India, 1995-6* (Bombay: Tata Services, 1995), pp. 32-3. All-India literacy in 1991 was 52.2 per cent, but if one removes Dalits from the calculation, the literacy rate of the remaining population is notably higher.

⁸⁰ In more than ten years studying Indian-language newspapers, including twenty weeks of travel in which I stayed in twenty towns, visited dozens of newspapers and interviewed more than 250 people, I did not – so far as I know – meet a Dalit journalist working for a mainstream publication, much less a Dalit editor or proprietor. My colleague Oliver

D.S. Ravindra Doss came to journalism through the publications of the two communist parties. With degrees in arts, law and education he had been a high school teacher before being persuaded by the Communist Party of India to work on one of its newspapers. By 1999 he was president of the Tamilnadu Union of Journalists, a left-wing union with 800 members affiliated to the Indian Journalists' Union. When elected in 1997, he said, the members had not known he was a Dalit:

Even if there are some Scheduled Caste journalists, they won't expose themselves because they will be treated separately [and] identified as Scheduled Caste. Even though they are all educated and progressive people, some journalists have in their mind communal feelings.[...] For example, now I am the president of the organization for nearly 800 journalists. That is the biggest organization in the state. But up till recently they [the members] don't know that I am Scheduled Caste. That opportunity had not come. There [was] no necessity for it.

His caste origins became known only when he married a Brahmin woman, also a communist worker. The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu state, K. Karunanidhi (b. 1924), attended the wedding and praised the caste-crossing marriage: "He referred [to it]...., because I have married a Brahmin lady.[...] That is why other journalists came to know I am an SC." Wide knowledge of his caste origins, he believed, would not make his work more difficult; he had a reputation, he said, among journalists for dedication and diligence "and they love me very much".⁸¹

Ravindra Doss estimated that between ten and fifteen Dalit reporters and sub-editors, and no more, worked on all the newspapers in the state of Tamil Nadu, where the total Dalit population by the late 1990s was close to 12 million people (more than 19 per cent of the state population). Dalit journalists faced an exquisite dilemma. If castes origins were known, "he will not come up. That is in practice. They [newspaper managements] don't tell [this] openly. In practice [however] they will marginalize." Newspapers were not interested in Dalit stories unless they involved spectacular violence or brushed against sensitivities about "positive discrimination" – "reservation", as it is known in India.

Practically no newspaper is against Scheduled Castes. But at the same time, they are not bothering about their life also. They don't take any special care for the

Mendelsohn, co-author of an extended study of Scheduled Castes, could offer only one suggestion, a Dalit from Karnataka who had worked for the *Deccan Herald* and *Prajavani* before starting a Kannada weekly in 1985. This was Indudhara Honnapura, whose weekly, *Suddi Sangaati*, claimed a circulation of 44,000 in 1987. *PII*, 1991, Part 2, vol. 1, p. 322. Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany, *The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁸¹ Interview, D.S. Ravindra Doss, President, Tamilnadu Union of Journalists, Chennai, 21 January 1999. Ravindra Doss first joined the Communist Party of India, then moved to the Communist Party of India (Marxist)

treatment of Scheduled Castes.[...]

Only Dalits can have the full feeling of their sufferings. They are the people who suffer. That cannot be experienced by others.[...] If a particular journalist is a Scheduled Caste, he can write more than other journalists because he is the person involved in the problem.

But according to Ravindra Doss Dalit-run newspapers, advocated by some activists as a necessity, were not a solution:

You cannot divide journalists on the basis of community. If you divide them, the first casualty will be the Scheduled Caste people who are working in journalism. They'll be isolated. And it is giving a key to start [similar] organization by other-community journalists, and naturally in the process, there will be a clash. If the clash starts now, they [Dalits] will be marginalized even more.

On the basis of this analysis, Dalits had to rely on patience. They were too vulnerable either to declare who they were on newspapers where they had jobs or to start newspapers of their own. The handful in journalism in the 1990s had to try to "pass" – to keep their caste status as quiet as possible – and to write the sorts of stories their superiors called for. Dalit readers – of whom there were now potentially 40 million throughout India – would have to accept newspapers that rarely focused on their organizations, triumphs, problems or "human interest". Indian newspapers had not yet found it necessary to do what many US newspapers did from the 1920s: cover African-American stories in a specially named section of the newspaper.⁸²

The state of Tamil Nadu was not typical. Elsewhere, the place of Dalit journalists was less advanced. Indeed, if you asked an Indian journalist "Do you know any Dalit journalists?", the answer could be a long pause and then, "Could you give me a couple of days ...?" Sometimes it was a considered no.⁸³ Newspaper managements had no policies for recruiting or encouraging Dalit journalists. A typical response came from the Gujarati daily *Sandesh*:

We have not looked at that [the presence of Dalits on the editorial side of the newspaper]. We don't really bother what caste he [a journalist] is. We like to give opportunity to a deserving person.⁸⁴

⁸² Armistead S. Pride and Clint C. Wilson, *A History of the Black Press* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1997), pp. 127-31

⁸³ These were the reactions from two of the most attuned and widely connected journalists I know – Mukul Sharma and P. Sainath. Among other widely experienced journalists on whom I pressed this question were P.K. Roy of *Ajkal*, Mrinal Pande, formerly of *Hindustan*, and longtime South Asia correspondent of the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Hamish McDonald.

⁸⁴ Interview, Balwant Shah, senior editor, *Sandesh*, Ahmedabad, 2 February 1999.

"Lack of qualifications" was often given as a reason for the absence of Dalits from newsrooms. "Scheduled Castes and lower castes are not that much qualified over here," said an editor in Gujarat. "In the journalistic class, very few backward classes are there."⁸⁵ Yet close to 22 per cent of Gujarat's population – close to 10 million people – was made up of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. There was also the claim that because of the low status journalism had as a profession, educated Scheduled Caste youths had more attractive options, especially the reserved places in government service.⁸⁶

Malayala Manorama, India's largest circulating daily in the late 1990s, had Dalits among its journalists, but it was embarrassing for them if their origins came to be known. "We never treat them separately, but they are not in a very big position of course."⁸⁷ Another experienced Malayalam editor argued that Dalits "are not present in the newsrooms, they are not present in press clubs, they are not present in journalism departments. Their issues are not reported or published in the dailies."⁸⁸

The closest I came to meeting a Dalit journalist with the potential for wide influence was when I met the journalist and law graduate who had taught me Malayalam in Trivandrum in 1971. In 1993 he was serving out his time in the Kerala public service as an "additional director" of public relations, bypassed for the director's job because, he believed, he was a Dalit. *Dalit Voice*, the idiosyncratic fortnightly first published from Bangalore and later from New Delhi, believed that "Dalits do not have even a single publishing house in Kerala."⁸⁹ And this was Kerala, where lower castes usually had slightly better chances of escaping prejudice and discrimination.

In the United States, Blacks constitute about 13 per cent of the population, comparable to the 15 per cent of India's people that Dalits constitute. However, the place of Blacks in American journalism in the 1990s contrasts sharply with the near-absence of a Dalit press and Dalit presence in newspapers in India. The first Black publication in the United States dated from 1827. By 1891 there were more than 150 such publications, and the Black press was extensive enough to warrant a survey entitled *The Afro-American Press and its Editors*. Two broad groups spearheaded African-American newspapers: business people and

⁸⁵ Interview, Pratap T. Shah, Editor, *Saurashtra Samachar*, Bhavnagar, 3 February 1999.

⁸⁶ Interview, M.D. Nalapat, Corresponding Editor, *Times of India*, New Delhi 13 February 1999.

⁸⁷ Interview, Jose Panachipuram, Chief News Editor, *Malayala Manorama*, Kottayam, 25 January 1999.

⁸⁸ Interview, Jose T. Thomas, freelance book editor, formerly news editor of *Deepika*, Kottayam, 25 January 1999.

⁸⁹ *Dalit Voice*, 16-31 January 1997, p. 3.

the clergy. They had the essential qualifications: advanced literacy, wider connections and a little money. Successful Black newspapers like the *Atlanta World* and the *Chicago Defender* were businesses first and social crusaders second.⁹⁰ Robert Sengstacke Abbott, founder of the *Defender*, "who had started out as a publisher with only his kitchen and parlour, became a millionaire".⁹¹

The contrast with Dalits is striking. Dalits have no religious or educational organizations comparable to the African-American churches. The slowly emerging Dalit business class of the 1980s made its money, not by supplying other Dalits as merchants, but by selling products to all, like other capitalist manufacturers. Unlike early Black business people, Dalits were not forced to work with, and cater for, their own people; if successful, on the contrary, they could aspire, as Blacks rarely could in the United States until the 1960s, to be part of regional or national elites. In 1998, for example, the President of India was a Dalit; but India did not have a single senior Dalit journalist.

American newspapers in the 1980s sometimes crackled with tension between African-American and white reporters, but it could be interpreted as a necessary, creative tension, stemming from the fact that Blacks and other minorities now were a presence in newspaper offices. In the 1970s, the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) set a goal that by the year 2000 American minorities would be represented in newsrooms in proportion to their numbers in the general population. That would have meant 26 per cent minority representation and 13 per cent Black. The goal would not be met. In 1998, a survey in the *Columbia Journalism Review* found that Blacks accounted for 5.4 per cent of newspaper staffs; minorities, 11.5 per cent.⁹² Nevertheless, major newspapers sought to recruit top African-American journalists to satisfy affirmative action targets, and Blacks were publishers and managing editors of major publications across the United States.⁹³

But on the overwhelming majority of Indian newspapers in the 1990s there simply were no Dalits. "Practices designed to diversify newspaper

⁹⁰ Bernell Tripp, "The Black Media, 1865 - Press: Liberal Crusaders or Defenders of Tradition" in William David Sloan (ed.), *Perspectives on Mass Communication History* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991), pp. 172-8. Juliet E. K. Walker, "The Promised Land: The Chicago *Defender* and the Black Press in Illinois: 1862-1970" in Henry Lewis Suggs (ed.), *The Black Press in the Middle West, 1865-1985* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), pp. 24-5. Vishnu V. Oak, *The Negro Newspaper* (Yellow Springs, Ohio: Antioch Press, 1948), p. 22.

⁹¹ Pride and Wilson, *History of the Black Press*, p. 137.

⁹² David K. Shipler, "Blacks in the Newsroom: Progress? Yes, but ...", *Columbia Journalism Review*, May-June 1998, pp. 29-32.

⁹³ Kurtz, *Media Circus*, pp. 96-7, 103-4, 111, 118, 295. Shipler, "Blacks in the Newsroom", p. 29.

staffs have no currency in India", Kenneth Cooper, the New Delhi bureau chief of the *Washington Post*, concluded in 1996.⁹⁴ Proprietors, however, declared that "it's not an issue ... When we hire, we don't ask for their caste ... We don't exactly know how many of them are Dalits. I'm sure there are quite a few."⁹⁵ Another proprietor said:

Yes, a lot of people [are Dalits]. A number of people ... pressmen.[...] On the editorial side, too, two or three people are there.[...] We don't select people on the caste basis. I don't care about those things. Only criterion is qualifications and efficiency.⁹⁶

A senior editor in the Indian Express chain was proud of the fact that he had two Dalits – a photographer and a sub-editor – on the Tamil daily he edited. At the English-language *Indian Express*, he said, there was "not even a single one. With great difficulty, one Backward Caste boy joined ... The down-trodden section has not been taken in good numbers."⁹⁷

The absence of Dalit reporters, sub-editors and editors, much less owners, meant that stories involving Dalits lacked the insights that Dalits themselves could provide. "It's a practical problem", an American journalist said of the absence of Blacks in US newsrooms, "in the sense that you literally don't find out about stories." And stories about Dalits that did get into newspapers mirrored a trend in the coverage of Blacks in the United States: "Blacks and other minorities were usually portrayed as needy or in conflict ... 'It would appear' ", wrote an analyst who surveyed the *Baltimore Sun* in 1996, "that minorities rarely travel, eat or get married."⁹⁸ This statement applied with far greater force to Dalits in India. And although it was true that Dalits probably travelled less than other Indians, they married as relentlessly and would surely have liked to eat as much. If the tasks of reporting, as we have come to understand them, are to be carried out effectively, Dalits must become part of an institution as vast as the Indian-language press. The tensions

⁹⁴ *Washington Post*, 5 September 1996, p. A16 [india-news@indnet.bgsu.edu]. Cooper is an African-American whose career began on an African-American daily, the commercially successful *St Louis American*. Interview, Kenneth Cooper, New Delhi, 9 February 1999. Armistead S. Pride and Clint C. Wilson, *A History of the Black Press* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1997), p. 267.

⁹⁵ Interview, K. Kumaran, Managing Director, *Dinakaran*, Chennai, 18 January 1999.

⁹⁶ Interview, R. Krishnamurthy, Editor, *Dinamalar*, Chennai, 19 January 1999.

⁹⁷ Interview, R.M.T. Sambandam, Editor, *Dinamani*, Chennai, 19 January 1999. Born in 1935 and an admirer of the iconoclastic Periyar E.V. Ramaswami Naicker, Sambandam came from the militant non-Brahmin tradition in Tamil politic; he worked for much of his career on English-language publications of the Indian Express chain. "Backward Caste" refers to lower castes but not to Scheduled Castes (the so-called "untouchable" castes).

⁹⁸ Shieler, "Blacks in the Newsroom", pp. 27, 31.

in American newsrooms were part of a process that helped to ensure that issues of special concern to African-Americans got covered and that issues of race got treated from a wide variety of viewpoints.

As we saw in Chapter 5, Indian-language newspapers in north India were owned by members of "forward castes", people who would be labelled Vaisyas, Kshatriyas or Brahmins if we were to play the game of pin-the-caste-on-the-proprietor.⁹⁹ The south was somewhat different. Ramoji Rao of *Eenadu* was a Kamma, an agricultural caste of the Telugu-speaking area. The owners of the *Prajavani* (and the *Deccan Herald*) in Bangalore were Idigas, a Kannada caste, once associated with the occupation of making toddy, an alcoholic and therefore ritually impure drink. S. P. Adithanar, founder of *Dina Thanthi*, whose descendants remained so influential in Tamil newspapers, was a Nadar, again a lower caste once connected with toddy-making.¹⁰⁰ What such proprietors had in common with those in north India was not traditional caste status, but modern commercial occupations. In south India, castes connected to commerce and willing to engage in trade sometimes prospered as capitalism advanced under the British. Not having high-caste status in the old system, and the accompanying effete prejudices, could be an advantage in the newer world of money-making. The Idiga family owning *Prajavani* and the *Deccan Herald* were said to have made a fortune from the liquor trade in Bangalore during the Second World War.

The newspapers associated with these families aimed at being general, commercial dailies. They pitched their coverage where they calculated their readers' – and advertisers' – interests lay. Those readers were disproportionately urban and higher status. Critics accused such families of having become citified, joined the elite and forgotten their roots.¹⁰¹

Perhaps the most notable near-exception was *Kerala Kaumudi*, the Malayalam daily of Trivandrum, which originated as a weekly in 1911. Until *Mathrubhumi* opened a Trivandrum edition in 1980, *Kerala Kaumudi* was the city's daily newspaper, even though its owning family were Ezhavas, traditionally the toddy-tapping caste of Kerala. Though not the lowest caste in the state, Ezhavas suffered severe civil disabilities in some localities till the 1940s, and they might be equated with castes now grouped in north India under the umbrella of OBC – "other backward castes".

From the 1940s, *Kerala Kaumudi* served as Trivandrum's daily. Non-Ezhavas bought it, as its circulation of 40,000 in 1960 attested (*Malayala*

⁹⁹ For example, S.K. Sharma, *Political Communication and Local Newsmedia* (Almora: Shree Almora Book Depot, 1992), pp. 57-8.

¹⁰⁰ Hardgrave, *Nadars of Tamilnad*, pp. 22-3.

¹⁰¹ Interview, V.T. Rajshekar, Editor, *Dalit Voice*, New Delhi, 9 February 1999, referring particularly to the owners of the *Deccan Herald* in Bangalore.

Manorama then stood at 89,000 and *Mathrubhumi* at 74,000).¹⁰² But *Kerala Kaumudi* also painstakingly covered Ezhava issues – holymen and politicians, meetings and festivals, achievements and grievances.¹⁰³ *Kerala Kaumudi* shared with successful African-American newspapers the need to succeed as a business. But in contrast to African-American newspapers, *Kerala Kaumudi* was also able to succeed as a general daily, win higher-caste and non-Hindu readers and serve its town of origin.

In the 1980s *Kerala Kaumudi* faltered when challenged by the spread of multi-edition dailies in Kerala. The death of K. Sukumaran, the family elder, in 1981 led to internal wrangling, and the paper's circulation, in spite of new publication centres in Calicut and Alleppey, fell to 130,000 in 1996 from 145,000 in 1991.¹⁰⁴ Dalit activists also attacked the paper for having become "a stooge of the Brahmin-led CPM Govt. [sic] of Kerala".¹⁰⁵ This would always be a dilemma for a newspaper trying to be both a successful business and a voice for particular groups and causes. Nevertheless, *Kerala Kaumudi*'s troubles in the 1990s probably had more to do with the generational crises that affect family businesses than with the special characteristics of being a newspaper owned by people outside the charmed circle of upper castes. *Kerala Kaumudi*'s story underlined the difficulty of succeeding in the newspaper business for people without ready access to capital – and this of course characterized almost all Dalits as well.

Dalit politicians, particularly Kanshi Ram, creator of the Dalit-based Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), recognized that the lack of a presence in the media meant Dalit stories were seldom told as Dalits might want them to be.¹⁰⁶ A clash in Delhi between reporters and the retainers of

¹⁰² *ABC January-June 1960*, pp. 5-6. *Malayala Manorama* belongs to a Syrian Christian family of high status and with a long commercial tradition. *Mathrubhumi* began as a nationalist daily with a variety of share-holders, mostly Nairs, traditionally a high-status land-controlling caste in Kerala. By 1998 control of *Mathrubhumi* was largely held by a Jain family.

¹⁰³ *Kerala Kaumudi* was founded by the Malayalam writer, C.V. Kunjuraman, and grew to success as a daily newspaper under his son, K. Sukumaran. It had a circulation of 1,200 in 1942, by which time the princely government of Travancore regarded it as having ceased to be anti-government. It supported the brief attempt by the Travancore rulers to become independent of India in 1947. Police Report, 11 September 1942, in Travancore Confidential Section [hereafter TCS], No. 101/1946 and Daily Report, 25 June 1947, TCS, No. 508/1947 (Kerala Secretariat).

¹⁰⁴ *ABC January-June 1991*, p. 6. *ABC July-December 1996*, p. 4. Circulation recovered to 146,000 in 1998. *ABC January-June 1998*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ *Dalit Voice*, 16-31 May 1997, p. 15.

¹⁰⁶ In Chicago, the *Defender* "provided news of Chicago's black community not found in the white dailies – a black perspective of Chicago news events – and ... information ... affecting blacks, which the white dailies ignored ..." Walker, "Promised Land", p. 46.

Kanshi Ram and Mayawati, who had been Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in 1996 and 1997, dramatized the problem. The retainers beat up a band of persistent media people assembled at the house in Delhi where the Dalit politicians were staying. The resulting outcry in the newspapers thundered for days.¹⁰⁷ Kanshi Ram and his supporters declared that the events were blown out of proportion and that it was impossible to have their version heard. Shortly after, he announced that the BSP would start its own media centre. Writing after Kanshi Ram's announcement, *Dalit Voice* declared that "Enemy No. 1 is this mighty media owned by the BSO [Brahminical Social Order]." Kanshi Ram's aim was to start dailies in Hindi, English, Marathi and Gurmukhi. "Strength will come", *Dalit Voice* declared, "only through a Bahujan cultural revolution which can be engineered only through our own media."¹⁰⁸

However, the resources necessary to conduct a daily newspaper proved difficult for Dalit organizations to find. Successful newspapers depended either on large general readerships which guaranteed advertisers (e.g. *Kerala Kaumudi's* experience in Trivandrum), or on strong support from a prosperous section of a particular group (e.g. the old Black press in the United States). In the 1990s Dalits appeared to lack both.

A growing Dalit elite, however, began to press for representation in the mainstream press. Kenneth Cooper's research for his *Washington Post* piece in 1996 started a reaction that was still working itself out three years later. It led to a column in an Indian daily by B. N. Uniyal. "I do not know any Dalit journalist", Uniyal had told Cooper, "but I can ask some friends. I shall let you know in a day or two." Uniyal described his reaction to Cooper's question:

Suddenly, I realized that in all the thirty years I had worked as a journalist I had never met a fellow journalist who was a Dalit; no, not one. And worse still was the thought that ... it had never occurred to me that there was something so seriously amiss in the profession ...

After going through the names of nearly 700 journalists accredited to the Press Information Bureau in New Delhi, Uniyal was unable to identify a single Dalit. "What would journalism be like", he mused, "if there were as many journalists amidst us from among the Dalits as there are among the Brahmins?"¹⁰⁹

Some Dalits wondered too. In 1998 Dalit intellectuals presented a

¹⁰⁷ *Economic Times*, 26 October 1996 – "Journalists get a taste of 'Kanshi Ram rajya'" [<http://www.economictimes.com/261096/poli3.htm>].

¹⁰⁸ *Dalit Voice*, 16-31 May 1997, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ B.N. Uniyal, "In Search of a Dalit Journalist", *Pioneer*, 16 November 1996, p. 10. Cooper's piece ran in the *International Herald Tribune* on 6 September 1996 (p. 4).

memorandum to the Editors' Guild and the Press Council demanding that the US experience be used as an example and targets be set for Dalit representation in Indian newsrooms by the year 2005.¹¹⁰ Analysis of the editorial pages of the English-language *Times of India* and *Hindu* for the first nine months of 1996 found that each had carried only four articles about Dalits out of 717 articles in the *Times of India* and 478 in the *Hindu*. The writers asked:¹¹¹ "Is it likely that an inherently undemocratic media will create democratic opinion in India?" The chairman of the Press Council replied that action of the kind demanded in the memorandum was beyond the powers of the Council because "the print media is run entirely by the private sector".¹¹²

The absence of Dalits from Indian newsrooms highlighted characteristics of a "free press" in liberal, capitalist democracies. Freedom depended on paying the bills, and "free" newspapers needed readers with purchasing power – first, to buy the newspaper and then to hold out the promise of buying the advertisers' products. "There would be no Dalit", wrote my Kerala friend who was brushed aside for the job of public relations director, "even [o]n the periphery of a reader-profile [compiled by a marketing agency]".¹¹³ Dalits were overwhelmingly poor.¹¹⁴ Unlike African-Americans, they lacked a merchant class and an organized clergy of their own. It was equally enervating that successful Dalits, if they chose, could pass as prospering urbanites of unknown caste. The certainty of colour did not throw them back on their own people and resources as it did African-Americans.¹¹⁵

How important was the nearly total absence of Dalit journalists? A friend chided B. N. Uniyal:¹¹⁶ "Do you think any of us writes or reports as a Brahmin journalist, or as a Kayastha journalist or a Jain journalist?" Mainstream publications could handle Dalit issues "sensitively",

¹¹⁰ Chandra Bhan Prasad and Sheoraj Singh Bechain, *End Apartheid from Indian Media. Democratise Nation's Opinion* (New Delhi: Authors, n.d. [1998]), pp. 17-18. The pamphlet is dedicated to Uniyal.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 14.

¹¹² Interview, P. B. Sawant, Chairman, Press Council of India, New Delhi, 9 February 1999.

¹¹³ V.K. Narayanan, "Media and the Dalit", paper delivered to the UGC National Seminar on Dalit Studies, Calicut, 17-19 February 1998.

¹¹⁴ *Dalit International Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 2 (June 1996), p. 1. In the late 1980s, more than half of Dalits lived below the lowly Indian poverty line.

¹¹⁵ "If I had not been quite so black", said a nineteenth-century African-American baseball player excluded from the well-paying white leagues, "I might have caught on as a Spaniard or something of that kind.[...] My skin is against me." Geoffrey C. Ward, *Baseball: an Illustrated History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), pp. 40-1.

¹¹⁶ *Pioneer*, 16 November 1996, p. 10.

contended an observer of the Tamil press, though "it's not done by Dalits."¹¹⁷

But recall Bagdikian's gatekeeper who admitted that he downplayed the Catholic Church whenever choices had to be made. Were Dalit stories likely be treated any better on copy desks around India? B.R. Ambedkar (1892-1956), the most prominent Dalit of the twentieth century, contended that "with the press in hand it was easy to manufacture great men." From this V.K. Narayanan concluded: "As there is no proper media for the Dalits, there will not be any 'press-made' great men among the Dalits."¹¹⁸ Americans needed black heroes like Martin Luther King and the baseball player Jackie Robinson, but they also needed media ready to celebrate such people. The journey had barely begun towards an Indian-language press in which Dalits were significantly represented and Dalit heroes were recognized. Yet until such a journey was accomplished, India's liberal democracy would be gapingly incomplete.

Women

When *Malayala Manorama* captivated readers with its coverage of the "Pulpalli raid" in 1968, the presence of the young woman Naxalite, Ajitha, lent allure to the story. More than thirty years later, Ajitha still featured in the pages of *Malayala Manorama*, though not as prominently as when she was young. Her presence illustrated two aspects about the place of women in Indian-language newspapers. First, "gatekeepers" open their gates to stories of which they approve; if "your people" are not among the gatekeepers, the gates will not open very wide or may not open at all. Secondly, although English-language and Indian-language newspapers both cater to elites – people who can read and buy – the elites they cater to are different. "Their proximity to a more conservative and traditional readership", asserted Ammu Joseph and Kalpana Sharma, "makes regional [i.e. Indian] language publications prone to reactionary views."¹¹⁹

In 1999 Ajitha was part of a movement in northern Kerala which called for an inquiry into allegations about sexual exploitation of women by politicians and officials. A public meeting in Trivandrum, the state capital located in southern Kerala, at which she announced she would go on a fast until an inquiry was set up, received revealingly different coverage. The English-language *New Indian Express*, published from

¹¹⁷ Interview, A.S. Panneerselvam, Chief of Bureau, *Outlook*, Chennai, 21 January 1999.

¹¹⁸ Narayanan, "Media and the Dalit", p. 8.

¹¹⁹ Kalpana Sharma and Ammu Joseph, *Whose News? The Media and Women's Issues* (New Delhi: Sage, 1994), p. 136. There is a positive side of this proximity. The Indian-language press covers stories the English-language press misses. Shubhra Gupta, "The Hindi Press", in *ibid.*, p. 167.

Cochin, topped its state news page with a nine-paragraph account of the meeting under a four-column headline: "Sex cases: Ajitha to go on indefinite fast." On the opposite page it carried a photograph of the chief speakers, including a stern, substantial Ajitha, whose image contrasted strikingly with the well-known photo of the captive in 1968.¹²⁰ *Malayala Manorama's* Trivandrum edition, on the other hand, gave the meeting two paragraphs at the bottom of page 7 under a one-column headline – "Ajitha will begin a hunger satyagraha." A senior editor at *Malayala Manorama* explained that Ajitha was a north Kerala personality, that she had "become part of the establishment now", that this was "a sex scandal only, not any social activism", and that this was simply "not a major story" in southern Kerala.¹²¹

It seems at least as likely, however, that the overwhelmingly male editorial staff at *Malayala Manorama* had little sympathy for either the issue or the women involved. "A popular impression among journalists about feminists", according to a journalist (a woman) in north India, was that they "are rabble-rousing, dogmatic, Western-oriented, not rooted in the reality of India, not open-minded, anti-family, and pro-divorce."¹²² Such feelings could plausibly produce the same actions as Bagdikian's gatekeeper towards Catholics: "I don't help them a lot." Editors at *Malayala Manorama* also judged that their readers – unlike those of the English-language, and therefore implicitly more cosmopolitan, *New Indian Express* – would be little interested in Ajitha and the sexual-exploitation charges. In 1968, on the other hand, Ajitha's presence in the "Pulpalli raid" titillated *Malayala Manorama's* readers with an implicit sexual dimension to a gripping story of politics and violence.

Women in the 1990s were estimated to hold about 8 per cent of jobs on Indian newspapers. They experienced constant "conservatism and gender bias", which was said to be especially prevalent in small-town publishing centres.¹²³ Vijay Chopra of *Punjab Kesari* illustrated attitudes when he explained why the newspaper did not have a woman on the editorial staff in 1993: women marry and leave.¹²⁴ The presence of women also required adjustments. At *Sakal* in Pune, where six women

¹²⁰ *New Indian Express* (Cochin), 24 January 1999, pp. 4 and 5.

¹²¹ *Malayala Manorama* (Trivandrum), 24 January 1999, p. 7. Interview, Jose Panachipuram, Chief News Editor, *Malayala Manorama*, Kottayam, 25 January 1999.

¹²² Quoted in Sonia Bathla, *Women, Democracy and the Media. Cultural and Political Representations in the Indian Press* (New Delhi: Sage, 1998), p. 125.

¹²³ *Frontline*, 4 October 1996, p. 99. The estimate of eight per cent comes from P. B. Sawant, chairman of the Press Council. See also Sabina Inderjith, "Women and Journalism" in *Tamil Nadu Journalists' Association. Third State Conference. Salem 1998* (Salem: no Publisher, 1998), no page numbers.

¹²⁴ Interview, Vijay Kumar Chopra, Chief Editor, Hind Samachar Group, Jalandhar, 20 May 1993.

were working as journalists by 1993, the paper had designated a "Toilet for Ladies" as distinct from the more numerous "Toilet[s] for Staff". (*Sakal* also kept fresh flowers in vases around the building, but that may have been a legacy of the founder's enthusiasm for gardens.)

However, women presented a challenge for proprietors that Dalits did not, because many women had spending power and thus represented a crucial audience for advertisers. Even in relatively poor households, women made day-to-day purchasing decisions about food, soaps and household goods. Advertisers of household goods looked for newspapers that could show large numbers of women readers.

At *Andhra Jyoti*, once the chief rival of *Eenadu* in Telugu, executives believed that from the 1980s Telugu women increasingly became both readers and decision-makers. The newspaper's canvassers claimed that women now were far more "visible" in the decision about which newspaper a family would buy. As part of its tactics to capture women readers, *Andhra Jyoti* introduced a serialized novel into the main newspaper. Circulation improved – but was it chiefly among women? – and faltered when the paper stopped the serials. It quickly reintroduced them.¹²⁵ *Eenadu* replied with techniques that had worked elsewhere. It introduced a women's page seven days a week as part of the main newspaper in 1992. Circulations continued to rise, and even more importantly, so did advertising revenue from advertisers with household and "women's" products to sell.¹²⁶

Indian-language newspapers were just beginning to become centres of struggle over the role of women. Newspapers needed women readers, but most regarded women journalists as a nuisance to avoid if possible. Even the estimate that women held 8 per cent of jobs on Indian newspapers distorted the picture on Indian-language newspapers. Evidence suggested that women tended to be employed on English-language publications or in administration rather than journalism. "In smaller towns", where Indian-language newspapers often operated, "the owner-trader-politician-criminal nexus was strong",¹²⁷ and women were deterred from newspaper work. Overall, the presence of women in Indian-language newspapers was scant, though no doubt growing. A study in the early 1990s interviewed thirty women journalists, only six of whom had a connection with the Indian-language press. Only three of those still worked for Indian-language newspapers.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Interview, Moturi Venkateswara Rao, Director (News), Spotnews Pvt Ltd (*Andhra Jyoti*), Hyderabad, 13 March 1993.

¹²⁶ Interview, Piush Bahl, Assistant Manager (Advertising), *Eenadu*, Hyderabad, 1 March 1993.

¹²⁷ *Frontline*, 4 October 1996, p. 100, quoting the Chairman of the Press Council (P.B. Sawant) and Mrinal Pande, *Hindustan*.

¹²⁸ The three were Mrinal Pande, then of *Hindustan*, the Hindi daily of the *Hindustan*

In working on this book I met only one woman reporter on an Indian-language newspaper. A Hindu in her twenties, Ratna Chotrani was covering commerce and science on *Siasat*, the Muslim-owned Urdu daily of Hyderabad. Her qualifications were impressive: a journalism degree from Osmania University in that city, a Master of Business Administration from Madras University and a journalistic apprenticeship with the news agency, the Press Trust of India. During her apprenticeship, she began contributing to *Siasat*, whose editor offered her a job. "I got a lot of encouragement from this office ... [it has] a very 'family' atmosphere," she said. Not knowing Urdu, she wrote in English, and her stories were translated on the news desk. "They have never made a single mistake in translation. I get my news items translated by my father who happens to read Urdu so I know what they write." *Siasat* provided a remarkable environment for a woman reporter. Chotrani felt she had the support and interest of the small staff of a dozen sub-editors and reporters and of the soft-spoken editor-owner who had inherited the newspaper from his father. "I will never leave journalism," she said, explaining that *Siasat* gave her freedom to cover stories that interested her.¹²⁹ Chotrani seemed to perform her tasks to the satisfaction of her editor and colleagues, who treated her presence as special – like having a daughter or sister working with them.

The few other women on Indian-language newspapers whom I met were either sub-editors with desk jobs and regular hours or at senior levels of management. In Vijayawada, M. Leela was the chief sub-editor on *Eenadu's* district-daily for Prakasam district. A native of Vijayawada, she had come to the newspaper straight from college eight years earlier and had always worked as a sub-editor, never as a reporter. "We have quite a few women now," she said. "Conditions [have] changed for the past 8-10 years and many are coming into this work," but chiefly as sub-editors. Of "reporters we have only a few."¹³⁰ *Eenadu's* manager in Vijayawada confirmed her impression: there were few women correspondents because women were unwilling to work irregular hours, especially after dark.¹³¹ In 1999 there were no women journalists at all on *Dina Thanthi*, the largest Tamil daily.¹³²

Around India, many newspapers concluded that fiction and soft news

Times chain, and two women who wrote for the soon-to-collapse Telugu daily, *Andhra Patrika*. Rama Jha, *Women and the Indian Print Media: Portrayal and Performance* (New Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1992).

¹²⁹ Interview, Ratna Chotrani, reporter, *Siasat*, Hyderabad, 3 March 1993.

¹³⁰ Interview, M. Leela, Sub-Editor, *Eenadu*, Vijayawada, 8 March 1993.

¹³¹ Interview, Ch. Emmanuel, Manager, *Eenadu*, Vijayawada, 8 March 1993.

¹³² Interview, T.K. Rajagopal, D. Rajiah, R. Thiruvadi, *Dina Thanthi*, Chennai, 20 January 1999.

were “women’s work”. Dismissing the journalistic prowess of a woman rival, a Tamil editor wrote that “she was reporting ‘soft stories’ on art and culture ...”¹³³ In Kerala, the editor of *Mathrubhumi*’s faltering Malayalam weekly described “the target readership” of two successful competitors as “either the housewives or working women” who wanted to read snatches of novels and short stories.¹³⁴ The two rivals – *Manorama Weekly* and *Mangalam* – had combined weekly sales of 2 million copies in 1996. That ratio of one copy for every fifteen people in Kerala suggested that at least a few men were furtive readers.

Although male journalists continued to write for female readers and purported to know what women read and what women could capably report, women began to move into positions on newspapers that they had not previously held. This was partly because commercial pressures – the need for advertising – drove newspapers to reach out to new audiences. At *Sakal* in Pune, Swati Raje became the first fulltime woman editorial employee in 1987. Encouraged by a mother-in-law who was herself a writer and had worked for the Marathi daily *Kesari*, Swati Raje answered an advertisement for graduate trainees at *Sakal*. Married to a civil engineer and with a daughter born in 1990, she believed the hours and the demands made it difficult for a woman to run a household and be a reporter. Her sympathetic mother-in-law had been essential for her career. By 1991 Raje was editor of *Sakal*’s literary and Sunday supplements. Her talents fitted with a male stereotype about women journalists: she admitted a preference for features and “soft news”, even though she had worked as a reporter and done occasional crime stories. “Generally”, she said, “people don’t like ladies going out crime reporting.” Her elevation to an expanded supplements department was apparently resented by some older men, but ability and enthusiasm strengthened her position. With the new Sunday supplement *Sakal* was said to have gained 10,000-15,000 sales in six months.¹³⁵

Women tended to work on women’s pages or women’s magazines. M. Sarita Varma, the only woman sub-editor on the Malayala *Manorama* chain’s women’s magazine, *Vanitha*, in 1993 typified the scope and limitations for women as journalists on Indian-language publications. In her twenties, Varma came from the most genteel and aristocratic of backgrounds: the old ruling family of the princely state of Cochin. She had a post-graduate degree in Old English from the University of Kerala and was finishing a master’s degree in Development Studies. When

¹³³ Maalan of *Kumudam* in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 15 March 1997, p. 494.

¹³⁴ Interview, M.T. Vasudevan Nair, Editor, *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, *Grihalakshmi* and *Chitrabhumi*, Kozhikode, 3 April 1993.

¹³⁵ Interview, (Mrs) Swati Raje, Editor, Sunday magazine supplement, *Sakal*, Pune, 17 March 1993.

deciding on a career she felt she had a choice between teaching or journalism, but chose journalism because she liked to write. She replied to an advertisement for recruits for *Malayala Manorama* and was hired after a detailed selection procedure. Why was she hired? The "employers thought that there had to be a woman," she replied with an embarrassed laugh. "Private companies are generally reluctant to employ women because of obvious biological restrictions." Her boss was frank: "Females in *Manorama* [are] a rare breed. We have only Sarita and two operators on the telephone exchange." Although she travelled to Kottayam from Cochin by train every day, Varma emphasized the difficulties facing a woman in Kerala who wanted to be a reporter: an unmistakable stigma attached to women who travelled at night or visited places like tea-shops.

Social attitudes shape the Indian-language press. Mrinal Pande caught the essence of the dilemma they pose for women:

Krishna finally rang up her mother and told her about her decision, about her friend speaking to the head of a Hindi news agency, about the job which was as good as hers.[...]

"Oh", her mother said. "How exciting." Then she paused. "But what about the long hours? The political pressures? The rounds of police thanas [stations], riot-hit areas?"[...]

"What about them?"

"Can you cope? Seriously do you want to? Men lose respect for women if they are seen too much in the company of those political creatures."¹³⁶

Evidence that attitudes of Kerala people were changing lay in the fact that *Malayala Manorama* began to hire women in the mid-1990s. By 1999, where once there had not been a single woman, half a dozen women worked as sub-editors and reporters in Kottayam and another three or four in Trivandrum.¹³⁷ To be sure, larger proportions of women were to be found in the newsrooms of most English-language dailies; but in India the English language carried status, just as much as an expensive watch or a flashy car. Although newspaper duties brought risks for a woman's reputation, working in English carried a compensating reward in prestige. English was also a financial asset, which families had often spent money to have their girls acquire. The possessor should use the asset, even if it meant taking on some of the social risks that attended women working for newspapers. Finally, to have acquired English sometimes suggested more liberal attitudes and a readiness to work in jobs from which women were once excluded. Such considerations, common among English speakers, only slowly and variously affected attitudes about women working on Indian-language newspapers, especially since their managements did little to encourage women.

¹³⁶ Mrinal Pande, "And Four-Day Long Your Youth", draft ms. 1999.

¹³⁷ Interview, Jose Panachipuram, Kottayam, 25 January 1999.

In the early 1990s the few influential women in print media were usually in management positions, often in English-language undertakings. At *Sakal* in Pune, Sheela Padmanabhan, whose mother-tongue, she said, was English and who had lectured in zoology, came to the newspaper at the request of the Pawar family, the new owners, to do marketing.¹³⁸ Shobha Subrahmanyam, one of the most influential women in Indian newspapers,¹³⁹ was the general manager of *Ananda Bazar Patrika* in Calcutta in 1993. Like Padmanabhan, she came from a national-elite background and was not a journalist. A Malayali whose father had been a senior official of Indian Railways, she had lived all over India, married a Tamil, and read Bengali but not Malayalam. She had been an executive with Clarion Advertising Services before joining the newspaper in 1979.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, in Bombay, Mohini Bhullar, advertising director of *India Today*, noted for her astute grasp of Indian advertising, had no role in the editorial side and did not read an Indian language.¹⁴¹

I encountered only two notable exceptions. The best known was Mrinal Pande, who in 1993 was Executive Editor of *Hindustan*, the Delhi-based Hindi daily published by the Hindustan Times chain. A fiction writer in Hindi and English, Pande had edited *Saptahik Hindustan*, a Hindi weekly which the chain closed in 1992. Scathing about the way in which managements treated their Indian-language publications as second-class revenue earners, Pande moved briefly into television where she became a popular news presenter before resigning in disillusionment.¹⁴² Sheela Bhatt, senior copy editor in 1993 of the new Gujarati edition of *India Today*, was one of a tiny group of women who had done everything in journalism – and all of it in an Indian language. Daughter of a Bombay diamond merchant, she married a Gujarati journalist whom she met when she wrote to rebuke him for the content of his magazine. She went to work for the magazine and later started a rival Gujarati weekly.¹⁴³

Because newspapers seek to reflect the societies in which they live, they often provide a social barometer, a guide to existing conditions

¹³⁸ Interview, Sheela Padmanabhan, Corporate Adviser, *Sakal*, Pune 19 March 1993.

¹³⁹ She was chosen as vice-president of the Indian Newspaper Society in 1997 and elected chairperson of the board of directors of United News of India (UNI) in 1998. *HIE*, 4 October 1997, p. 12 and 3 October 1998, p. 13.

¹⁴⁰ Interview, Shobha Subrahmanyam, Chief Executive, *Ananda Bazar Patrika Limited*, Calcutta, 4 January 1994.

¹⁴¹ Interview, Mohini Bhullar, Advertising Director, *India Today*, Bombay, 30 April 1993.

¹⁴² Interviews, Mrinal Pande, Joint Editor, *Hindustan*, New Delhi, 10 February 1993, 7 May 1993, 8 and 10 February 1999.

¹⁴³ Interview, Sheela Bhatt, Senior Copy Editor, Gujarati *India Today*, New Delhi, 13 February 1993.

and a pointer to change. The place of women in genuine journalist roles on Indian-language newspapers provided such a measure: their numbers in the Indian-language press were scant, the jobs few and the prejudices against them formidable. Yet the fact that any women at all worked on Indian-language newspapers marked a change. National seminars sought to change values by proclaiming the need to "sensitize" managements to "a vast grey area particularly in the regional language press and in smaller towns where women journalists are discriminated against".¹⁴⁴ Probably more effective, the growing recognition that to increase circulation, newspapers had to cultivate women readers promised to open up possibilities for women as journalists. From there, the possibility of eventually breaking into top editorial jobs moved slightly closer. "Now times are changing", said a proprietor of the largest Gujarati daily in 1999, "and the girls are also becoming more assertive." He concluded that attitudes would relax still further in the next twenty years.¹⁴⁵ But even in countries claiming far higher rates of literacy, newspaper penetration and female autonomy, women in top editorial positions were rare in the 1990s.

The consequence of a paucity of women writing and editing Indian-language newspapers nevertheless meant that the "woman's angle" on a story would be just that – an angle – and an angle probably determined and written by men. Good-looking revolutionaries might rate picture-page prominence; stern feminists would get two paras on page 7. The pace at which such clichéd treatment declined would depend on how rapidly women began to work on Indian-language newspapers. In spite of the despair of some women,¹⁴⁶ newspapers willing to encourage a substantial influx would give the wheel of history a visible shove.

"Dedication ... makes the difference"

What conclusions can we draw from scrutiny of the people who write and edit Indian-language newspapers? Proprietors ultimately determine the biases of their newspapers by hiring the people who produce them, but the chore of turning out a daily newspaper falls to the gatekeepers – reporters and editors. Their background, training and conditions affect hundreds of decisions every day – about whether to inflate casualties in a riot or, as the sub-editor in Bagdikian's US example declared, to minimize favourable publicity for the Catholic Church.

¹⁴⁴ Report on the National Seminar on Women and Media, New Delhi, 7 September 1996, in *Press Council of India Review*, vol. 17, no. 4 (October 1996), pp. 35-6.

¹⁴⁵ Interview, Nirman Shah, Executive Editor, *Gujarat Samachar*, Ahmedabad, 1 February 1999.

¹⁴⁶ For example, Bathla, *Women, Democracy and the Media*, p. 122.

Around India, variation in the training of journalists may have resulted from the long-standing experience of proprietorial families, some of whose members believed that systematic training and good production had intrinsic merit. They may also have calculated that even if such standards cost more, they brought rewards. Such conclusions may have arisen from proprietors' judgements about the nature of their readers.

Production standards seemed higher, and news-gathering more systematic, on Bengali, Malayalam and Telugu newspapers. Hindi and Gujarati newspapers exhibited different characteristics, and the production values of *Gujarat Samachar* or *Aj*, for example, appeared slipshod in comparison with leading Bengali, Malayalam or Telugu dailies. Similarly, Hindi and Gujarati newspapers exhibited a disdain for training.¹⁴⁷ Their calculations may have been that their readers were new readers, for whom print itself was sufficiently novel that it did not require great sophistication in design or subtlety in writing. Among the leading Hindi-newspaper families, only Ashwini Kumar of *Punjab Kesari*, so far as I am aware, had extensive training in journalism overseas, and he quickly saw the wisdom of failing in with readers' preferences.¹⁴⁸

The background and training of editors and journalists was crucial for the way in which gatekeepers did their job and for the "fix" or "charge" that a newspaper brought each day to its readers, old and new. The fact that almost no Dalit men or women worked even in minor editorial jobs on Indian-language dailies meant that aspects of the life of Dalits were neglected. And the fact that no sizeable daily in India was owned or edited by Dalits meant that stories about them were unlikely to receive the constant, sympathetic coverage of stories about, for example, the urban, consuming middle class.

Similarly, the paucity of women in reporting and editing jobs on Indian-language newspapers meant that events about women were usually treated in predictable ways. There were women's pages and women's features, because women were increasingly recognized as consumers. And there were stories about criminal offences against women because crime sold and sex-related crime sold better. What was missing was the coverage, which only women could give, of important events in which women were central figures. Divorce, family planning, maternal and child health, sexual harassment – only women reporters could have the necessary access to probe such questions adequately.¹⁴⁹ It is one

¹⁴⁷ An experienced Gujarati journalist strongly criticized the lack of training on Gujarati newspapers. Interview, Vijay Sanghvi, freelancer, formerly of *Sandesh* (Ahmedabad), New Delhi, 9 May 1993.

¹⁴⁸ This is clear from his story about the attempt to remove the magazine from the front page of *Punjab Kesari* after the "emergency". When circulation fell, the magazine quickly went on front again.

¹⁴⁹ Joseph and Sharma (eds), *Whose News?* makes this point throughout.

thing for the daughters of the English-speaking elite to become a significant presence on English-language dailies in big cities. Such developments are of a piece with Indira Gandhi being Prime Minister: elites play by different rules. But the arrival of more women in the newsrooms of Indian-language newspapers will signal major social changes among the lower middle classes, even of India's small towns. If daughters with limited English are able to work for Indian-language newspapers, those languages, their printed forms and the businesses associated with them will all have acquired an enhanced status. And the salaries will have to be good enough to make it worthwhile to risk the remarks of jealous neighbours about women who take unwomanly jobs. Before families are ready for their women to risk the stigma of a career in journalism, freedom struggles will have to be won at the well and in the kitchen. But once women arrive in the newsrooms in strength, the process of achieving greater autonomy will be easier to promote and harder to stop.

It is possible to take different views of Indian-language journalism: one rosy, the other decidedly not. Through the rose-coloured lens, one could see teams of young journalists, including women, taking advantage of the opportunity to write about events close to their own lives and families. For the first time in many areas and for many people, the opportunity existed to cast light on actions formerly kept dark and to create “public spaces” where issues were contested and where the “public opinion” thus created was brought to bear.

In Kottayam, for example, a young news editor prided himself and his team on having transformed *Deepika*, the oldest Malayalam daily, started by Carmelite priests in 1889. “For the last 50 years if you look at the paper, I am sure there would not have been any change.” In six months, however, in spite of a price rise, they claimed to have increased circulation by 7,000 copies as a result of probing stories, careful layout and writing related to people's concerns. “We started to [focus on] Kerala – Kerala, Kerala. This is one part of the new reporting and editing we started.” Another was to take advantage of the fact that *Deepika* was prepared to distance itself from both Kerala's major political alliances – unlike “the monopoly press”, by which he meant the two biggest Malayalam dailies, *Malayala Manorama* and *Mathrubhumi*.

So we are here to say that U[nited] D[emocratic] F[ront] [and] L[eft] D[emocratic] F[ront] – they are both accomplices. They are doing the same. So people are hating it. Those who are not too much identified with the parties – that is the majority of the people – they are coming to appreciate us.

In 1992, they started a small research bureau which led *Deepika* to take up stories like fraudulent railway contractors doing fake repairs in nearby Alleppey district. “The local people met almost all the dailies

in Malayalam, but nobody was much interested because [of the influence of] those contractors ..." *Deepika* put the story on the front page with telling photos of cracked bridge repair works. In spite of an inferior printing plant, the *Deepika* team claimed "a spirit of crusade.[...] Dedication is there and that makes the difference."¹⁵⁰

As the basis for generalization such vignettes have serious limitations. Yet they illustrate the way in which the newspaper revolution opened up possibilities for "journalists" – probing, writing, disseminating people of the kind that have provided models for the past two hundred years. Journalists are essential in the revolutionary process of creating something wider than face-to-face local relations. They are essential, in short, for the making of "a public" – and then using "public opinion" to influence events. Without *Deepika* and the front-page photos of the cracking railway bridge – photos laughed over in tea-shops up and down Kerala – the cracked bridge would not have been repaired. The newspaper revolution created openings for hundreds of similar journalists to do their best or worst. That, at least, is the view through the rose-coloured lens.

Through the other eye-piece, one could see journalists poorly trained and paid, kept in insecure employment to perpetuate dependence on their proprietors; journalists seeking to please their bosses with wild or untruthful reporting; stringers seeking to use their accreditation and the fear they might arouse for blackmail and gain. One could see newsrooms with no women, and an industry from which an entire category of 150 million people was virtually absent – Dalits.

What was not in doubt was the importance that outsiders now ascribed to Indian-language journalists. The editor of *Punjab Kesari* was invited to private conversations with the Prime Minister. And powerful interests – or those seeking to be powerful – sought to control journalists by kindness and coercion, favours and fear. The contest to harness journalists, and control Indian-language newspapers, is the subject of the final chapter.

¹⁵⁰ Interview, Jose T. Thomas, Chief News Editor, *Deepika*, Kottayam, 12 April 1993. Thomas left *Deepika* in 1996, called by charismatic Catholicism. In 1999 he and friends were planning to launch a weekly newspaper dedicated to Christian values and sound reporting. Interview, Kottayam, 25 January 1999.

CONTROLLING

The capacity of marks on a page to outrage and inspire, to shackle and liberate, makes human beings different from other species. From the beginning, everyone exposed to print has wanted to control it.¹ These struggles for control take various forms – from bribes and favours to arson and murder. At the same time, journalists and proprietors exercise their own forms of control over the people for whom they write. Though vulnerable, the press also appears powerful.

In such equations, Indian-language newspapers occupy a special place – capable of inspiring fear and respect, often among people newly exposed and therefore newly sensitive to print. This potent intimacy between Indian-language newspapers and speakers of their languages distances such newspapers from English-oriented elites in New Delhi and the world. Indian-language newspapers thus become more vulnerable than their English-language equivalents. The murder of a Hindi-language journalist, or the burning of a Telugu press in a country town in Andhra Pradesh, is unlikely to provoke a national and international outcry. But an attack on a television crew in New Delhi generates footage for evening news broadcasts around the world.²

Two broad sets of contests take shape around newspapers. The first is between newspapers and the state. The state attempts to control newspapers – ostensibly to protect citizens by preventing outrageous and harmful matter from being publishing. We know, however, that the people who run states often use the state apparatus to serve their own ends. Running a newspaper in a modern state is like dancing with a bear – distance and formality are essential, for one partner at least. Indian newspapers have waltzed with bears for two centuries. How much freedom will governments allow newspapers to exercise? How much freedom can newspapers assert against the state? How may

¹ Eisenstein, *Printing Revolution*, pp. 244-54, for the attempts of the Catholic church to control early printers and publicists.

² *Economic Times*, 26 October 1996 [<http://www.economicstimes.com>]. Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) retainers attacked journalists at the house of party leader Kanshi Ram. The interest and outrage of the English-language media went on for days. *Frontline*, 15 November 1996, p. 19.

governments control newspapers, short of suppressing them? In India's federation, where state governments are often guardians of a language, these questions are especially subtle and complex.

The second broad area of struggle involves individuals seeking to control newspapers and journalists seeking to benefit from their own control of the printed word. Enemies of the state and the social alignments that it protects – political revolutionaries and criminals – seek to have newspapers reflect their views. In one sense, they are little different from politicians, advertisers or powerful economic interests: they want to see themselves reflected handsomely. They differ from the others, however, in their methods: they will use violence. “Leaders of the people” – politicians – and people with economic goals aim to have newspapers favourably portray both themselves and the events that affect them. Ultimately, such attempts to secure “good publicity” may lead them to start newspapers of their own. Then they too discover the complexities of controlling a newspaper. Journalists and proprietors realize that a newspaper may be used for a variety of ends, not all of which involve fearless crusades for truth.

Two other contests swirl around and within newspapers, though I shall not discuss either in detail here. Newspapers seek, if not to control, to influence “the readers” or “the people”. Of the American press, Howard Kurtz writes: “From the first days of the republic, most newspapers were blatantly partisan vehicles that twisted news in all sorts of ways”.³ The aim in the United States in 1790 and 1890 – Kurtz might say to a slightly less extent in 1990 – was to influence people, to bring them round to particular ways of thinking and often of voting. In this, India in the twentieth century has been similar. Proprietors want to influence people. Before 1947, this often meant – especially for Indian-language newspapers – to influence them in favour of the nationalist movement and Indian independence. Since 1947, the choices are more varied. But proprietors want their readers to buy their newspaper, accept the validity of the economic and social system that secures the proprietor's place, perhaps vote for the proprietor's preferred party and buy the products that the proprietor's advertisers promote.

Finally, newspaper proprietors want to control their newspapers – to ensure that the newspaper says what they want it to say and reaches and influences the people whom the proprietor sees as the audience. The task is more complicated than it may seem. Journalists have minds – and ends – of their own, though the scales are weighted in favour of proprietors. But the contest is constant: journalists want to determine the nature of what they produce; proprietors want the outcome to reflect their requirements. Contests within newspapers are part of the business.

³ Kurtz, *Media Circus*, p. 138.

"Whose newspaper is it anyway?" is a longstanding proprietorial refrain. Proprietors usually win, as we have seen.

These relationships apply not only to newspapers in open societies but even to a certain extent in autocratic ones. For Indian-language newspapers, questions of control are particularly pertinent because print is new to vast numbers of people. It offers practices, opportunities and ideas to localities and readers hitherto little touched by such things. Because it is new, print may seem more mysterious and unpredictable, and reactions to it may be unpredictable as well. This first-generation experience is comparable in some ways to that in Britain or the United States in the eighteenth century when newspapers and publicists began to trouble the powerful and create new ways of affecting how power is wielded. Indian-language newspapers become magnets that attract the powerful, or those who would like to be, because the arrival of newspapers changes the conditions in which powerful people must operate. Newspapers therefore cry out to be controlled.

The state

The first amendment to the US constitution guaranteed freedom of speech and the press. The first amendment to the Indian constitution, passed in June 1951, curtailed those rights. It permitted governments to ban publication of material likely to disturb public order, incite people to commit a crime or harm relations with foreign powers.⁴

India in 1950 was different from the America of Jefferson and the England in which Nehru and other nationalists were educated. India had just been partitioned on religious lines. It had received millions of refugees and become home to an aggressive Communist Party. Challenges to the state from the Communists and religious zealots weakened enthusiasm for sweeping guarantees of free speech. By 1951, for example, the Sikh leader Master Tara Singh was said to have "virtually called for the assassination of Nehru" because of the government's refusal to create a Sikh-majority state.⁵ Such pressures led nationalists, who had protested for most of their lives against British restrictions on press freedom, to adopt the first amendment.

The catalyst came from Communist challenges to Nehru's government and from Romesh Thapar's case – "the most incredible experience of our life", Thapar's wife wrote. Distribution of Thapar's small, left-wing magazine *Crossroads* was banned in Madras; but the Supreme Court

⁴ D.S. Mehta, *Mass Communication and Journalism in India* (New Delhi: Allied, 1979), p. 173. Restrictions had to be "reasonable"; courts were given the power to decide what "reasonable" meant.

⁵ S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru*, vol. 2 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 122.

overturned the ban on appeal.⁶ The constitution of 1950 appeared to give a blanket guarantee of free speech: "All citizens shall have the right ... to freedom of speech and expression."⁷ With the precedent of the decision in Thapar's case, Nehru's government feared it would be impossible to control the press, no matter how inflammatory the writing might be.

Nehru himself looked for ways to "curb communal writing" without abandoning the principles of liberal democracy.⁸ Many of his colleagues were much less concerned about press freedom. Whatever they might have said about the sanctity of such freedom during the years of foreign rule, politicians in power did not rejoice at criticism from hostile newspapers. "Sardar Patel", wrote the editor J. N. Sahni, "both as Minister of Home Affairs and of Information, publicly advocated fullest freedom for the press. Privately he did not want anyone to tread on his toes."⁹

Once the first constitutional amendment came into force in June 1951, and before the first fully democratic elections in the winter of 1951-2, the national legislature passed the Press (Objectionable Matters) Act in August 1951. It gave governments the power to demand security from publishers and confiscate publications. Though such restrictions could be tested in the courts, they represented a major break with the freedom of the press that the Thapar case had permitted.¹⁰ In the first eighteen months of the new law, various government authorities brought more than 130 cases against newspapers.¹¹ J. Natarajan, historian of the press and editor of Punjab's old English daily the *Tribune*, observed that "the mere thought of prosecution has acted as a deterrent against the full exercise of freedom of the Press."¹²

Even without communist insurgency and communal rancour, Nehru's government and bureaucracy would have found it difficult to break from the habits of press control established by the British. The potential of print, especially print in Indian languages, to educate, reform, plot and incite troubled the authorities of the British colonial state. English, to be sure, became the most valuable and influential language in India. In 1835, after a long debate among officials, it was made the medium of administration and of most state-supported education. The first three

⁶ Raj Thapar, *All These Years* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1991), pp. 86-7. Romesh Thapar (1922-87) was well known later as publisher of the monthly *Seminar* and columnist in the *Economic and Political Weekly*.

⁷ Constitution of India, Clause 19(a).

⁸ Gopal, *Nehru*, vol. 2, p. 156.

⁹ Sahni, *Truth about the Indian Press* (New Delhi: Allied, 1974), p. 215.

¹⁰ Mehta, *Mass Communication*, pp. 174-5.

¹¹ J. Natarajan, *History of Indian Journalism*, pp. 175-7.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 177. The Act was repealed in 1957.

universities in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, founded in 1857, reinforced the understanding that to win good jobs a boy must know English.¹³ But what – officials mused – was going on in print in Indian languages? For British governments – and even for post-independence governments in New Delhi – Indian languages appeared to hold secrets and potential which ought to be watched, channelled and somehow contained. But how to monitor so many scripts and so many languages?

The short-lived Vernacular Press Act of 1878 highlighted British fear about the capacity of Indian languages to reach areas of Indian society that the rulers seldom tried to touch or understand. Provoked particularly by the growth of Bengali newspapers, the Act attempted to control a branch of the press – non-English newspapers – that seemed to contain grim possibilities to spread disaffection, rumour and sedition. British officials believed that Indian-language newspapers, read aloud to small audiences in the bazaar, did their “mischief” among “the ignorant and the unenlightened”. “The practice of blackmail” was also “alleged against some of the vernacular editors”,¹⁴ as it still was in the 1990s. The British estimated that no more than 100,000 people in all of India read such papers in the 1870s, but they attributed to those newspapers a potential to reverberate far beyond their actual readers.¹⁵ To control these dangers the Act empowered officials to demand bonds from untrustworthy “vernacular newspapers” and approval of proofs before publication.¹⁶ With the election of a Liberal government in Britain in 1880, the Act, which appeared to have little effect during its short life, was repealed in 1881. Thereafter English-language and Indian-language newspapers remained on the same legal footing.¹⁷

But British rulers continued to sense that Indian-language newspapers posed different threats and problems. First, the diversity of languages meant that no single person could have a detailed picture of what was going on in all of them. Secondly, as presses and newspapers spread, the volume of printed material grew – minuscule in terms of India's population, or by modern standards, but dangerous to foreign rulers in a volatile, complex country. In the 1870s there were estimated to be 280 newspapers in all of India.¹⁸ By 1910 there were 280 in the United Provinces (UP) alone.¹⁹ To keep track of them and minimize “their

¹³ J.P. Naik, *Educational Reform in India: a Historical Review* (Bombay: Orient Longman for the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, n.d. [?1979]), p. 1.

¹⁴ Uma Dasgupta, *Rise of an Indian Public* (Calcutta: RDDHI India, 1977), p. 269.

¹⁵ Dasgupta, *Rise*, pp. 34, 276.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

¹⁷ J. Natarajan, *History of Indian Journalism*, pp. 85-6.

¹⁸ Dasgupta, *Rise*, p. 1.

¹⁹ *Census of India, 1931, United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Part 1, Report*, p. 474.

general tone ... of opposition to Government",²⁰ the Government of India from the 1870s required provincial governments to compile a fortnightly or monthly "Report on Native Newspapers", a digest in English of highlights from a province's Indian-language newspapers. Compiled till the 1930s, the "Reports on Native Newspapers" became a major source for historians, providing the only surviving record of many newspapers.²¹

After the repeal of the Vernacular Press Act in 1881, printers and publishers had to register their newspapers with local officials, and their publications had to carry their names and addresses. Press Acts in 1910 (repealed in 1922) and 1931 attempted to keep newspapers under some form of legal control, but by 1931, as Milton Israel points out, it was politically impossible to leave decisions about newspapers simply to officials; the courts had to be given a role.²² The colonial state moved away from attempts to control newspapers by threats of legal action and towards more subtle and effective influences – rewards and punishments for individual proprietors and journalists.

By the end of the First World War most government departments were buying advertising, and even "a relatively small increase in revenue made a difference to the stability of struggling papers". Over the next ten years, according to Israel, official advertising "to selective Indian papers increased dramatically". This combination of commercial and official pressure inhibited larger newspapers from confronting the government too aggressively. The English-language *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of Calcutta asked successfully to be removed from the government's blacklist in 1925 because, it argued, it was a genuine friend of government in that it let it know what the people were thinking. The management of the *Hindu* at one point refused to carry banned nationalist material, and explained to Mahatma Gandhi that "they had made too large an investment in their presses to risk confiscation and ruin."²³

Indian-language newspapers often escaped these pressures. In weakness, there was strength. Governments, to be sure, worried about the unsettling effects these newspapers could have; but their diversity and number meant that officials failed often to notice them until long after an undesirable article had been published and widely read. Similarly, because businesses judged – as they did for a long time after independence – that readers of Indian languages were unlikely to be customers for

²⁰ C.E. Buckland in J. Natarajan, *History of Indian Journalism*, p. 85.

²¹ A great many academic theses depend heavily on these "vernacular newspaper reports".

²² Milton Israel, *Communications and Power. Propaganda and the Press in the Indian Nationalist Struggle, 1920-1947* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 6, 16. J. Natarajan, *History of Indian Journalism*, pp. 157-78.

²³ Israel, *Communications*, pp. 46, 63, 198.

their products, Indian-language newspapers survived without large amounts of commercial advertising and the dependence that it entailed.²⁴ However, when Indian-language newspapers did excite the interest of governments, the attack could be devastating. Perhaps the most notable was the closure of *Malayala Manorama* by the princely state of Travancore in September 1938. *Manorama* did not publish again until after independence in November 1947.²⁵

What was remarkable – and instructive for an understanding of the constraints within which newspapers work – was the difficulty which governments generally found in taking action against an Indian-language newspaper. Partly, no doubt, this resulted from the growing role of Indian politicians in the increasingly elected legislatures of the provinces. *Malayala Manorama*, we need to remember, was based in a princely state where the ruler had more scope for arbitrary rule than governments in British India. In British India to single out and pursue one newspaper was to risk making a martyr; and to attempt to censor the whole industry, though perhaps enforceable for a time, suggested a perilous emergency and an endangered government. J. Natarajan records that 130 newspapers had to deposit securities during the civil disobedience movement of 1930-3, but only nine papers stopped publishing.²⁶ During the Second World War and the Quit India movement of 1942, “the All India Newspaper Editors’ Conference ... gave an assurance that newspapers would observe certain voluntary restraints.” The conflicts between the government and newspapers were surprisingly few, and there were no suppressions to compare with that of *Malayala Manorama*.²⁷

Under the British a newspaper and its owners always felt vulnerable. Major Indian businesses rarely thought it wise to own a newspaper directly, although they were prepared to “hold ... the strings through donations, loans, advertising and remote control”.²⁸ After 1947, however, ownership looked secure, profitable and influential. Jawaharlal Nehru’s Congress government then faced a newspaper industry divided into three major categories: fast-disappearing British-owned English-language newspapers; Indian-owned newspapers which had been in the hands of nationalist sympathizers before independence; and newspapers acquired by Indian capitalists after independence.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 198.

²⁵ *Telegraph*, 19 February 1997, p. 9. The Travancore government’s calculations are outlined in Confidential Section, File No. 302/1938, Travancore English Records, consulted in the 1970s in the Kerala Secretariat, Trivandrum.

²⁶ J. Natarajan, *History of Indian Journalism*, p. 166.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 170.

²⁸ Sahni, *Truth about the Indian Press*, p. 198.

After independence, foes could become friends, and lukewarm supporters foes. British-owned newspapers posed no threat to the new government. Indeed, they sought peace and profit while they looked for ways of transferring ownership to Indians.²⁹ The *Statesman* of Calcutta, which did not become fully Indian-owned until the late 1960s, quietly suffered a loss of Rs 800,000 in government advertising in the years immediately after 1947 as Indian politicians diverted ads to proprietors who had supported them during the freedom struggle.³⁰

The establishment of the first Press Commission in October 1952 continued the search for the proper role for government in the press of a free country – and brought with it a cynical irony. One of the members of the Commission was C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyar (1879-1966), who as the Dewan of Travancore had shut down *Malayala Manorama* in 1938.³¹ The composition of the Press Commission illustrated the English-language dominance of the industry and the readiness of the post-independence elite to believe that creating a department of government or passing a law would achieve an end. The Commission recommended the creation of two institutions – a Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI), a central government body intended to monitor the industry and collect statistics, and a Press Council to oversee ethics and hear complaints.

The Commission also started a hare that ran for more than thirty years when it recommended imposition of a “price-page schedule” – government regulation to ensure that the price of a newspaper did not fall below a pre-determined price per page. Such a law aimed to prevent wealthy, ad-rich newspapers from selling a fat, cheap newspaper – say, twenty-four pages for a quarter of a rupee, most of it paid for by ads – when smaller newspapers with less advertising would be able to afford to give only an eight-page newspaper for a quarter of a rupee. By supporting smaller newspapers, many of which were in Indian languages, advocates of the price-page schedule hoped to control the capitalist press owned by self-interested industrialists. In fact, one of the great foes of the price-page schedule was *Sakal*, Parulekar’s pioneering Marathi daily of Pune, which took its resistance to the Indian Supreme Court in 1962. Although *Sakal* won and the court declared the measure unconstitutional, attempts to institute a price-page requirement continued into the 1980s.³²

²⁹ The *Times of India* had already been sold to Ramakrishna Dalmia in 1945.

³⁰ Israel, *Communications*, p. 198, citing an interview with J. N. Sahni.

³¹ Virendra Kumar, *Committees and Commissions in India, 1947-73*, vol. 1: 1947-74 (New Delhi: Concept, 1988; first published 1975), p. 233.

³² K.S. Padhy, *The Muzzled Press* (New Delhi: Kanishka, 1994), p. 31.

The Press Commission and later inquiries proclaimed the potential market for newspapers in the countryside.³³ But they envisaged such markets being served by cottage-industry style newspapers. These, they believed, were prevented from flourishing because of the unfair and unhealthy domination of the “monopoly press” owned by “big business houses”. Small – and therefore worthy – newspapers were starved of advertisements, stunted or never born because of the prohibitive competition of “big” newspapers owned by robber-baron capitalists. This analysis combined kernels of truth with a fair measure of calculation. The truth lay in recognition of the fact that burgeoning newspapers were capitalist enterprises. To gain readers a newspaper had to present fresh news in a manner to which readers could relate. This required investment in news gathering, printing technology and distribution, which capitalists could provide. Such newspapers, in turn, often gave their proprietors profits and nearly always gave them influence and status.

But Indian governments and their inquiries – the Inquiry Committee on Small Newspapers in 1964, and the Fact-Finding Committee on Newspaper Economics, which reported on the eve of the “emergency” in 1975 – were more concerned with management of the press than with the expansion of readership. Mrs Gandhi, Minister of Information and Broadcasting in 1964 and Prime Minister in 1975, wanted a press she could harness. The rhetoric of “socialism” justified the search for ways to hobble large, threatening newspapers – on the pretext of helping the small newspapers that genuinely promoted socio-economic change and political democracy at the grassroots. In fact, however, the debate had as much to do with calculations about which was easier to control: a few big urban newspapers or scores of smaller papers in country towns.

The “emergency” of 1975-7 brought these contests to a head, and thereafter left central governments reluctant to attempt broad schemes to redesign the newspaper industry. On the notorious night of 25/26 June 1975 Mrs Gandhi’s officials found it relatively easy to turn off the power to New Delhi’s street of major dailies, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, and effectively censor the next morning’s elite English-language newspapers. For the next nineteen months, major dailies proved fairly easy to control. None of the major English- or Indian-language dailies was suppressed, and only the Indian Express chain persistently struggled with the government. In Tamil Nadu, where a non-Congress state government led by K. Karunanidhi of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)

³³ *Report of the Inquiry Committee on Small Newspapers, 1965* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information, 1966). *Problems of Small Newspapers: an Analytical Study* (New Delhi: All-India Newspaper Editors’ Conference, n.d. [1972]). *Report of the Fact-Finding Committee on Newspaper Economics, 1975* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1975).

was dismissed by the centre only in January 1976, Tamil newspapers annoyed the central authorities more than most. Of nine publications subjected to pre-publication censorship by September 1975, at least three were Tamil. More significantly, perhaps, four of the nine were small and relatively obscure.³⁴

In a sense the central government easily won the contest to control the press during the "emergency". L. K. Advani, Minister of Information and Broadcasting in 1977-9 and later a stalwart of the Hindu-chauvinist Bharatiya Janata Party, was said to have remarked that journalists were told to bend but chose to crawl.³⁵ A few publications, including Raj and Romesh Thapar's *Seminar*, closed down in protest against censorship, and a few delighted in tricking censors and ridiculing the regime.³⁶ But large newspapers were simply too vulnerable: they needed electricity, newsprint, access to their presses – all of which could be quickly halted by a determined government. Their owners and journalists had commitments: assets to lose, mouths to feed, school fees to pay, cars to run. Mrs Gandhi abolished the Press Council, merged the four existing news services into one, and even forced Ramnath Goenka to reconstitute the board of the Indian Express chain with K. K. Birla, already chairman of the *Hindustan Times*, as chairman.³⁷ As well as censorship, the threat of closure and the arrest of journalists, the central government used advertising unblushingly to reward the cooperative and punish the recalcitrant. Central government expenditure on advertising more than trebled during the "emergency", and pliable newspapers found not only the volume of advertisements increase, but also the rate for them.³⁸

However, the "emergency" experience had less obvious yet enduring outcomes. The surprise that Mrs Gandhi's Congress Party suffered at the elections of March 1977 resulted partly from the fact that censored newspapers meant the rulers did not know what people were thinking and saying. *Amrita Bazar Patrika's* entreaty to the British government in the 1920s – we are really your friends because we tell you what the

³⁴ *White Paper on Misuse of Mass Media during the Internal Emergency (August 1977)* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1977), p. 29. During the "emergency" newspapers were given guidelines for self-censorship. Infringers of the guidelines had to submit proofs to the censors prior to publication.

³⁵ N. Bhaskara Rao and G.S.N. Raghavan, *Social Effects of Mass Media in India* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1996), p. 244. Others point out that 250 journalists were imprisoned during the "emergency". G. S. Bhargava in *ToI*, 20 August 1997, p. 15.

³⁶ Interview, Cho S. Ramaswamy, Editor, *Thuglak*, Madras, 25 March 1993. Cho, for example, stopped publishing for a time, then re-started and used advertisements to ridicule the "emergency". *Thuglak* was, he believed, the only publication whose ads were censored.

³⁷ *In Defence of Press Freedom. Minute of Dissent to the Report of the Second Press Commission 1982* (Calcutta: The Statesman, 1982), p. 25.

³⁸ *White Paper*, pp. 53-5.

people are saying – resonated in the 1977 election. As a way of getting the newspapers politicians wanted, heavy-handed censorship lost its appeal, at least for the generation that saw it did not work.

Politicians appeared to recognize that if competitive politics could not be abolished, then a place for public discussion – a public sphere – made such life more predictable and therefore safer. Moreover, the “emergency” seemed to change the minds of Mrs Gandhi and others about the virtues of small newspapers. Big ones *were* easier to control. Of the nineteen publications that remained banned for the entire “emergency”, none was substantial and only five were in English.³⁹

After the “emergency”, central and state governments continued to experiment with ways to control the press, but the panacea of creating “small” newspapers and breaking the nexus between “big business” and newspapers went out of fashion. In part, this reflected the growing assertion of Indian capitalism in the 1980s. But it also resulted from an understanding that big newspapers could be politicians’ friends. Political rhetoric adapted: a capitalist press was not necessarily an evil press.

For Indian-language newspapers this acceptance was important because it helped to encourage investment and reinforce efforts to attract major advertisers. As politicians courted successful newspapers in their regions, the newspaper business looked safer and more secure. Moreover, those newspapers that had struggled against the “emergency” – the Hindi daily *Punjab Kesari*, for example – gained an enhanced reputation. Its elderly proprietor Jagat Narain was briefly detained, and his newspaper “resisted the censorship and they were very harsh on us.[...] They cut our electricity.[...] They imposed censorship.[...] They didn’t allow us to publish news items.”⁴⁰ *Punjab Kesari* adopted, as we have seen, its characteristic “magazine-style” format: cinema stories, travel features, children’s photographs, all the standard elements of a magazine – on the front and back pages.

After the “emergency” much of the Indian press enjoyed the surge in circulation of *Punjab Kesari*. Magazines flourished. *India Today*, founded during the “emergency”, transformed magazine publishing with improved production and snappier prose.⁴¹ Censorship had created a vast reservoir of millions of curious new readers, and the Janata Party government that came to power in 1977 nourished these conditions. It proclaimed freedom of the press as a high virtue, set up a Second Press Commission, re-established the Press Council and broke up the single national news agency created by Mrs Gandhi. Indian governments would

³⁹ *White Paper*, p. 72. Most had connections with Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), while others, like *Thaniniram* of Trivandrum, were regarded as scurrilous nuisances.

⁴⁰ Interview, Ashwini Kumar, Resident Editor, *Punjab Kesari*, New Delhi, 6 May 1993.

⁴¹ *The Best of India Today, 1975-1990* (New Delhi: Living Media India, 1990), p. 1.

not abandon the search for ways to control the press, but outright censorship and curbs on "big" newspapers no longer seemed desirable or possible.

Allocation of newsprint and the purchase of advertising were two ways open to the central government to put pressure on newspapers. It was difficult, however, for a central government to be too blatant in dispensing ads to favourites or withholding them from foes. Newsprint also provided possibilities for rewards and favours. During the "emergency", for example, the Registrar of Newspapers reported coyly that "the newsprint quota" to the *Indian Express* "was deferred from time to time".⁴² But newsprint was usually so scarce that unfair allocation would quickly be discovered and denounced by outraged papers throughout the country.

Until June 1955, newspapers and agents were able to import newsprint uncontrolled if they had the money to pay for it. Until the notorious mill at Nepa in Madhya Pradesh began production in 1956, India produced little newsprint.⁴³ Once the Nepa mill began, Indian newspapers had to confront what one editor referred to as "the NEPA nuisance" – expensive, poor-quality newsprint unreliably supplied but required to be used.⁴⁴ Controls on the import of newsprint grew with the shortage of foreign exchange, and government permission to import newsprint was required from 1955 onwards. In 1958 the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI), newly created on the recommendation of the Press Commission, became the national centre for vetting applications for import permission. By the early 1960s, once the war with China had worsened foreign exchange reserves, it took six weeks to get a licence to import newsprint. Thereafter, transactions were usually handled through the State Trading Corporation, not directly between newspapers and newsprint producers.⁴⁵ This system continued until "economic liberalization" began in the middle of 1991 when newspapers were allowed to import directly, subject to requirements to buy quotas of Indian newsprint.⁴⁶

Though the control of newsprint gave the central government the potential to pull newspapers into line, the growth of a black market

⁴² PII, 1977, p. 6.

⁴³ Adithanar had set up small-scale production of newsprint for *Dina Thanthi* during the Second World War, and newsprint factories were still among the *Dina Thanthi* assets in the 1990s. Interview, K. Kumaran, Managing Director, *Dinakaran*, Chennai, 18 January 1999.

⁴⁴ George, *Provincial Press*, p. 15.

⁴⁵ *Language Press Bulletin*, vol. II, no. 8 (May 1955), p. 3. *Report ... Small Newspapers*, pp. 138-41.

⁴⁶ *Language Press Bulletin*, vol. XL, no. 5 (February 1993), p. 4.

made government pressure less likely to be effective. Small newspapers, which governments said they wanted to encourage, made “exaggerated claims” about their circulations, received “excessive newsprint quotas”, and the “black market in newsprint” gained the potential to “flourish unchecked”.⁴⁷ Major newspapers, with a steady flow of advertisements, needed paper on which to print the ads; some small newspapers – mostly in Indian languages – had cunningly acquired larger newsprint allocations than they needed. A natural equation formed. One editor told the Inquiry into Small Newspapers in 1964-5 that he published a leading article proclaiming that “he had bought the newsprint for that issue in the black market and that the authorities had not taken notice of it [i.e. his editorial].”⁴⁸

India’s federation also provided room to manoeuvre, both for unruly newspapers and foes who wished to control them. The ability of Tamil newspapers to ridicule the “emergency” as long as they had a sympathetic state government exemplified the protection the federal system could afford. The same attributes, however, could make newspapers vulnerable to local foes. State governments, subject to less scrutiny, had scope to punish hostile newspapers. Again, Tamil Nadu provided examples. Under the AIADMK regime of Jayalalitha, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu from 1992-6, magazines that criticized the Chief Minister suffered assaults from her party workers or indeed, it appears, the police. The printer of *Nakkeeran* – a provocative and, some would say, scurrilous⁴⁹ weekly – died after being arrested and interrogated by police. Magazine offices were wrecked and people associated with the magazines assaulted. The publisher and editor of *Nakkeeran* were said to “routinely go underground every Friday evening” because they feared arrest and getting bail was difficult at weekends.⁵⁰ Some redress was possible because publications could appeal to the courts for preservation of their rights under the Indian constitution. But in a small town, with the telephone lines cut, the local police controlled by a hostile state government, and a mob outside a newspaper office, such possibilities perhaps brought little comfort.

State harassment and intimidation were among the most effective ways of bringing newspapers into line. Large English-language newspapers were better able to resist such pressure than small Indian-

⁴⁷ PII, 1963, p. 73. *Report ... Small Newspapers*, p. 137.

⁴⁸ *Report...Small Newspapers*, p. 49.

⁴⁹ One of *Nakkeeran*’s features in the 1990s was a biography of the imprisoned mass murderer “Auto” Shankar, whose deeds were linked to officials and the government. *Lavastia Newsletter*, vol. I, no. 10 (February 1995), p. 3.

⁵⁰ Sam Rajappa, “Dateline Madras: Ms Jayalalitha and the Press”, *Vidura*, vol. 29, no. 3 (September 1992), p. 31. See also *Frontline*, 8 April 1994, p. 109.

language newspapers because resistance depended on two capacities. First, large wealthy newspapers could hire lawyers to bring cases, pay for guards to secure buildings and provide quick, safe communications for people and stories. Second, English-language newspapers had fast access to the network of national and international outrage that could be activated if the newspaper or its people were attacked.

However, outside the great cities even editors of English-language newspapers could experience “officially sponsored blackmail and harassment” that sent them fleeing to New Delhi to recount harrowing tales to other editors. “Wherever he went after sunset”, it was reported of one such editor, “two giant-sized men with revolvers ... would follow him ... would whisper coarse abuses and homicidal threats.” There were intimidating phone calls in the middle of the night; his wife and children were followed and threatened. Complaints “to the police, ... the chief secretary and to the chief minister himself bore no results.” Finally, the editor fled and “never went back”.⁵¹ In this example, moreover, the editor worked for an English-language newspaper and had considerable status among other editor-notables in New Delhi.

Editors of small Indian-language newspapers, far from the succour of the Supreme Court or the national capital, face threats to their lives. “Editor’s death: police officer transferred” – this one-column headline recorded the murder in 1983 of Surya Chandra Gupta, editor of *Madhya Yug*, a daily of Baberu, a *taluk* headquarters, 140 km. south of Lucknow. The editor was “beaten up by hooligans alleged to be at the instance of the local police who did not like Gupta’s exposure of a fake police encounter”.⁵² A similar one-column headline on page 16 – “7 arrested for Editor’s murder” – chronicled the aftermath of the murder of an Assamese editor in Guwahati in 1996.⁵³ It was easier to resist threats and enticements if you worked for an English-language daily in New Delhi where your murder would at least be widely reported.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Sahni, *Truth about the Indian Press*, pp. 215-21. The editor was J. Natarajan of the *Tribune* in Ambala in the early 1960s when Partap Singh Kairon was chief minister of Punjab. Natarajan was the author the *History of Indian Journalism* prepared for the Press Commission of 1954.

⁵² *HIE*, 23 July 1983, p. 4. An “encounter” usually implies a murder carried out by police who report that the victim had attacked them.

⁵³ *HIE*, 25 May 1996, p. 16. To be sure, the *Hindu International Edition* is the overseas weekly, but the Guwahati murder got little attention in domestic editions of English-language newspapers. See also “Journalist killed”, recording the murder of a senior *Jagran* correspondent in western Uttar Pradesh. *HIE*, 31 October 1998, p. 12.

⁵⁴ “The arrest of four senior officials of the Guwahati Doordarshan Kendra by the Assam police is the latest in a series of intolerant actions directed against the media by the Assam Government,” reported the *Deccan Herald*, 23 January 1998. Doordarshan is India’s national television service, controlled by the central government.

This discussion makes it appear that a vicious state and out-of-control wielders of state power – police and politicians – preyed relentlessly on brave journalists who sought to bring truth to the people. The story of course is more complex and less one-sided. What newspapers publish may not be true. The printed word can wound, inflame and provoke. Newspapers can cause riots. Just as the British searched for ways, such as the Vernacular Press Act, to minimize the threats to their colonial state, governments of independent India sought to prevent newspapers from setting citizens to fighting. In 1929 Motilal Nehru bemoaned “a certain section of the Vernacular Press which no decent man ever reads”.⁵⁵ Thirty-five years later the Inquiry Committee on Small Newspapers, which was keen to find virtues in small newspapers, concluded that “many small newspapers ... have a tendency to publish unverified reports and are given at times to sensational, defamatory and scurrilous writing.”⁵⁶ The need to give readers what they want confronted editors. A Bengali editor-proprietor reported that

he had to adopt a communal policy because playing down riots and disturbances curbed his sales. “Even the newsboys refuse to touch my paper if my rivals report a larger number of deaths than I do.”⁵⁷

From most parts of India, there were reports of newspapers inciting one group of citizens against another, often on the basis of religion.

Punjab provided vivid and prolonged examples. The Press Commission of 1954 noted that “a section of the Sikh Press both in Urdu and Punjabi seeks to incite violence in the name of the 10th Guru [Guru Gobind Singh] for the formation of a separate Punjabi State”.⁵⁸ In 1978, at the time of killings in Amritsar that brought Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale to prominence, the newspapers of Jalandhar, the centre of newspaper publishing in Punjab, “succumbed to the partisan prejudices and indulged in trading half-truths and blatant lies thereby exaggerating group fears and sharpening sectarian enmities”.⁵⁹ The murder in September 1981 of Jagat Narain, founder-editor of *Punjab Kesari*, began the time of killing in Punjab which continued for fifteen years.

Government efforts to head off disorder often centred on Indian-language newspapers. English-language newspapers were published for

⁵⁵ Motilal Nehru to the Editor, *The Pioneer*, 22 June 1929, in Israel, *Communications*, p. 47.

⁵⁶ *Report...Small Newspapers*, p. 52.

⁵⁷ S. Natarajan, *A History of the Press in India* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962), p. 283.

⁵⁸ *Report...Press Commission*, vol. I, p. 386. Padhy, *Muzzled Press*, pp. 28-9.

⁵⁹ “Analyst” in the *Tribune*, 24 April 1978, p. 4.

3 per cent of the population, who were usually better off, better educated and with property to lose. Indian-language newspapers were capable of reaching much of the rest of the population, a population largely rural or rural-connected, much of it poor. How were governments to cope with the fact that such readers – or listeners to newspaper readings – could be presented with vicious lies that would lead them to anger, conflict and violence?

After the “emergency” and the failure of blatant censorship, various governments proposed or enacted laws to control newspapers. Most had to be dropped. Newspapers proved fairly able to look after themselves as long as democratic processes determined the rules of the game. In 1982, the governments of Tamil Nadu and Bihar passed legislation to punish journalists who published “baseless” news or “grossly indecent or scurrilous matter”. The President of India, faced with widespread protest, did not sign the Bihar bill and the government allowed it to die in February 1983. In Tamil Nadu, the legislation was repealed a year later.⁶⁰ In 1988 Rajiv Gandhi’s government was forced to abandon a Defamation Bill.⁶¹ In 1994 a bill to force newspapers to give the right of reply to offended individuals was also withdrawn.

The latter bill aimed “to counter sensation-seeking publications... *Punjab Kesari*, or the hundreds of regional language publications...”⁶² In this, the proponents of the legislation shared with the British of 1878 a sense that danger came from Indian-language newspapers. Their diversity made them difficult for any single person to read or oversee. Their readers were – by definition, as their critics would have argued – “less educated” than those who read English-language newspapers. Such readers were therefore more likely – such an argument ran – to be duped and aroused. Even their proprietors were portrayed as less cultivated and sophisticated, and therefore less able to interpret the world, than the owners and editors of English-language newspapers.

In an apparent response to this sense that much went on in Indian languages that escaped the notice of the central government, Rajiv Gandhi encouraged a monitoring service, similar to the “Reports on Native Newspapers” of the British, from about 1989 till November 1992. Edited by Suneet Vir Singh, wife of Mani Shankar Aiyar, a Congress (I) Member of Parliament and close friend of the Prime Minister, *India Speaks* was described as a commercial venture, which would provide insight into issues and attitudes in each language region. Its circulation hovered

⁶⁰ Laxmi Narain, “The Press in India: 1982-83” in *PAYB*, 1983, pp. 4a-5a. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 and 26 August 1982. *IT*, 31 July 1983, p. 73 and 15 August 1983, p. 19. *HIE*, 2 July 1983, p. 4. *EPW*, 12 March 1983, pp. 377-8.

⁶¹ *Indian Express*, Magazine, 16 October 1988, pp. 1, 6.

⁶² *BI*, 18-31 July 1994, p. 44. *SW*, 9 September 1994, p. 11.

around 300. It is unlikely that it ever made money, and it almost certainly had government support.

The problems of *India Speaks* in gaining a commercially viable circulation recalled the difficulties that the British found in monitoring Indian-language newspapers. Even in the 1990s a full range of Indian-language newspapers proved difficult to assemble reliably in New Delhi. Able translators were hard to find, and translators had their own idiosyncrasies. A Malayalam translator, for example, insisted that *Malayala Manorama*, the largest circulating daily in India at the time, published nothing worth translating.⁶³ The diversity of Indian languages made them hard for a central government to comprehend, much as national advertisers found it hard to comprehend their potential reach. Thus Indian-language newspapers were vulnerable and apparently powerful at the same time. Such ambiguousness made them appear all the more important for governments to know about and control. They did, after all, seem to be creating "the masses" out of millions of individuals who, before the newspaper revolution, lived unconnected with each other in the towns and villages of provincial India.

Politics, crime, insurgency and profit

Newspapers need the partnership of the modern state, however threatening it may sometimes be. But newspapers must also flirt with shadier partners – political insurgents and criminals. Indeed, the activities of such people are the stuff of good journalism. Every Indian-language journalist would agree that crime sells newspapers, and newspapers must therefore report crime, thereby running the risk of offending criminals or people alleged to be criminals. Similarly, political insurgency makes news: demonstrations, bombings and killings are events that readers want to know about. Newspapers must report them, but the way they do so is bound to offend or outrage someone. The consequences for newspapers and newspaper people can be dire.

From Cochin to Kanpur crime provided a key local feature for newspapers. Cochin, a port and commercial centre, was thought to be a particularly lively city for crime, according to editors at *Kerala Kaumudi*. Similarly, as a major industrial city, Kanpur had a working class that savoured crime stories. In Hyderabad *Andhra Prabha*, the Telugu daily of the Indian Express chain, usually ran a page devoted to crime each day. At *Siasat*, the Urdu daily of Hyderabad, the dapper crime reporter, more than twenty years with the newspaper, was one of the most important figures in the newsroom. In Pune, *Loksatta*, the Indian Express chain's Marathi daily, saw a strong crime desk as essential.

⁶³ Interview, Suneet Vir Singh, Publisher, *India Speaks*, New Delhi, 4 May 1993.

This may have been in part because of demonstrated reader interest: *Police Times*, a Marathi weekly broadsheet devoted to crime, carried fifteen or more colour pictures of criminals and victims on its front page. Printed on contract at the presses of the stately *Sakal*, *Police Times* had no advertising, but its selling price of Rs 3 for eight pages suggested a good return. A twelve-page Marathi daily at that time sold for Rs 1.50.⁶⁴

Crime sells newspapers, but it may also endanger them and their reporters. *Siasat*'s veteran crime reporter carefully emphasized that his links were with the police, not the underworld. The murder of the editor of *Madhya Yug* referred to above illustrated the dangers of reporting violence and illegal activity. Intimidation is a hazard of journalism, but it is more hazardous for those who work for Indian-language newspapers, particularly outside the major cities. Contrast two examples, both from Indian-language newspapers, one from Mumbai, the other from Orissa.

Nikhil Wagle, a young Marathi journalist, started *Hamara Mahanagar* ("our great city") as a Mumbai evening tabloid in January 1990. Wagle calculated that a "complete" evening newspaper that had more than crime reporting and political polemic would appeal not only to afternoon commuters but to the women and children to whom commuters took the paper home. He was right. The newspaper began with a print run of 25,000; within three years, Wagle said, it reached 120,000. He gave the newspaper a "strong editorial line and a strong editorial ideology" critical of the Shiv Sena, the aggressive Mumbai-based strong-arm organization and political party led by Bal Thackeray. "*Mahanagar*", Wagle argued, "was the first paper which had [the] guts to take on Shiv Sena". And in a remark that captured one of the paradoxes of the newspaper business: "I had nothing to lose at that time. *Times of India* has lots of things to lose ... [a] big building ... [a] big office." The controversy and violence that quickly surrounded *Mahanagar* no doubt helped its circulation: people began to read it to know what trouble was brewing around it. In October 1991 a Shiv Sena gang vandalized the *Mahanagar* offices and injured some of the staff, but the newspaper came out the next day. Wagle said:

The Shiv Sena, they are so fascist that after my editorial [the next day] it was a comic thing: their [the Shiv Sena's] entire office was protected. They got police

⁶⁴ Interviews: V. Vasudeva Deekshitulu, Editor, *Andhra Prabha*, Hyderabad, 12 March 1993; M.A. Jabbar Siddiqui, Crime Reporter, *Siasat*, Hyderabad, 25 February 1993; Sanjay Dwivedi, Assistant News Editor, *Swatantra Bharat*, Kanpur, 13 May 1993; A.P. Viswanathan, Executive Editor, *Kerala Kaumudi*, Trivandrum, 16 April 1993; Sheela Padmanabhan, Corporate Adviser, *Sakal*, 19 March 1993. Arun Khore, Chief Reporter, *Loksatta*, Pune, 18 March 1993. *Police Times*, 2 May 1993.

protection, because they thought that [when] I wrote ... "we will accept their challenge", I [was going to] ... attack [them]!⁶⁵

Court cases were launched against Bal Thackeray, *Mahanagar's* circulation rose and threats and attacks from the Shiv Sena became a regular aspect of *Mahanagar's* life.⁶⁶

By 1997 Wagle and *Mahanagar* had had six years near the centre of rough, threatening controversy. At one point it was reported he had received telephone threats to his young son and that Wagle himself "never steps out of his home without the security of two policemen".⁶⁷ Wagle was imprisoned for four days by the Maharashtra legislature in 1994 for an editorial which the legislators believed insulted them – it pointed to the expanding links between politicians and criminals. In December 1996 *Mahanagar* offices were again attacked by Shiv Sena gangs, and police, apparently following instructions from the BJP-Shiv Sena government, charged Wagle with "inciting passions" by having carried reports of speeches that attacked Thackeray.⁶⁸

Throughout this strife *Mahanagar* continued to appear, and none of the journalists involved was killed or badly injured. And this is the point: Wagle was working in Mumbai. He knew how to use the advantages of the great city to protect himself and his newspaper, even if it was an Indian-language newspaper. Indeed, the sources for the above discussion are evidence of the advantages on which Wagle could draw. Those sources are India's major English-language dailies and two of its foremost news magazines (more than that, some of the stories were obtained from the World Wide Web, downloaded to a computer in Australia). Wagle was able to use national and international publicity – a journalist's most effective bodyguard – to make his case known beyond the boundaries of Maharashtra, a state run by a government hostile to him. Similarly, when he was struggling with the Shiv Sena in 1993, his supporters organized a demonstration of leading journalists from all over India in front of the Shiv Sena offices in the Mumbai

⁶⁵ Interview, Nikhil Wagle, Editor and Managing Director, *Hamara Mahanagar*, Bombay, 30 April 1993.

⁶⁶ One case against Thackeray, initiated by the state government, was withdrawn by the BJP-Shiv Sena government of Maharashtra in February 1997. *Times of India*, 7 February 1997 [<http://www.timesofindia.com/today.mbom5.html>]. But Thackeray was briefly arrested and bailed on another charge arising from the same incident. *SW*, 22 February 1997, p. 4.

⁶⁷ *IT*, 30 September 1993, p. 17.

⁶⁸ *Frontline*, 20 May 1994, pp. 114-15, *Statesman Weekly*, 21 May 1994, p. 7. *Frontline*, 10 January 1997, p. 134. *HIE*, 28 December 1996, p. 5. *Deccan Herald*, 15 December 1996 [<http://www.pugmarks.com/deccanherald/dec15.sena.htm>]. *Indian Express*, 17 December 1996 [<http://express.indiaworld.co.in/ie/daily/19961217/35250072.html>]. I am grateful to John Robinson of La Trobe University for the material from the WWW.

suburb of Dadar. The list of participants was a rollcall of India's major newspapers and editors.⁶⁹ Wagle's enemies complained that his good connections allowed him "to convert a purely local rivalry between *Saamna* of Bal Thackeray and *Mahanagar* into a national issue".⁷⁰ In short, good connections – personal and electronic – in a great city mitigated the loneliness of the Indian-language journalist.

Contrast this with an incident in Orissa. On 3 October 1980, a twenty-three-year-old woman journalist called Chhabirani was raped and murdered, allegedly because she and her husband had been writing stories exposing local corruption in Biridi block (a block is the smallest rural administrative unit). The stories were published in *Pragativadi* ("the revealer, the exposé"), a Bhubaneshwar-based daily founded in 1973. Eventually, and to great surprise, twelve men, "including the block Congress (I) committee president and secretary", were convicted of the rape and murder, and eight were sentenced to life imprisonment. According to a scathing account by journalist Arun Sinha, "the entire official media was organised" to discredit Chhabirani and her husband. The offenders were identified and convicted only because *Pragativadi* "risked everything and launched a fearless campaign" to avenge the death of its correspondent. The threat of publicity had not been enough to protect Chhabirani, but it had surprisingly proved powerful enough to convict her murderers. Indeed, the convictions caused amazement. "Journalism in Orissa", according to Sinha, "took a new turn."⁷¹

Sinha vividly described the vulnerability of a small-town journalist working for an Indian-language newspaper:

For such a journalist there is hardly any support in his [the murdered journalist was a woman!] fraternity. At small places, nine out of ten journalists do not serve the people but are aligned with the freebooters in politics, business or the bureaucracy.

... all the horrible tales of atrocities on journalists in Orissa have come from small places, the characters everywhere being similar to those who killed Chhabirani. In the capital, Bhubaneshwar, there has been no violence against the Press to date.[...] The risk a small town journalist runs is, however, much higher. He is entirely on his own. The capital provides some security...

... a newspaper published from Delhi or Madras has rarely any space for Orissa. There is no need to do so. There is no flow of news

Chhabirani and her husband lacked most of the protection enjoyed by English-language journalists and by big-city Indian-language journalists

⁶⁹ *HIE*, 18 September 1993, p. 9.

⁷⁰ *Organiser*, 3 October 1993, p. 12.

⁷¹ Arun Sinha, "The Politics of Journalism in Orissa", *India Express*, Magazine, 24 January 1982, p. 3, from which all quotations come. See also *PAYB*, 1981, p. 4a.

like Wagle. Yet by being intensely local, they had the capacity to generate immense local rage. A *Times of India* leading article on diplomatic relations with Pakistan was unlikely to provoke murder in rural Orissa. The nearness to readers – of the people written about and the language written in – made such local reporting immensely potent within its own sphere. That potency could put journalists in danger or in a position to intimidate and blackmail, as we shall see.

Local crime and criminals threatened Indian-language newspapers and their workers. But when a region confronted insurgency against the government, the dangers increased. The conflicts may have been of a class-war, Marxist kind, as they had been in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, where groups styled Naxalites, fighting against the police and landowners, struggled to get their version of events heard. A country stringer's murder may then rate five paragraphs in a major English-language newspaper. "A news contributor of the *Udayam* daily, Chada Sridhar Reddy, was gunned down by PWG Gopana dalam [a People's War Group unit] at Chada village near Bhongir in Nalgonda district [in Andhra Pradesh] late last night," the *Hindu* reported in a story datelined 24 June 1994. The reporter was said to have "received threats from the naxalites", who branded him a police informer and held him responsible for the killing of one of their number in an encounter with police. According to the *Hindu's* correspondent, the dead writer

incurred their displeasure for not writing according to their wishes. At the same time, the special police parties were also after him, mistaking him for a naxalite sympathiser, as he used to receive statement[s] from the PWG cadre quite often.⁷²

Udayam itself was a Telugu daily embroiled in controversy. Its proprietor, a Congress (I) politician and liquor manufacturer, closed the paper in May 1995 and was himself murdered, allegedly by the People's War Group, in December 1995.⁷³

Regional secessionist movements put Indian-language newspapers in the sights of both insurgents and the state. In Punjab, *Punjab Kesari* and its Urdu and Punjabi stablemates (collectively known as the Hind Samachar chain), owned by the Jalandhar-based Chopra family, were at the centre of the Khalistan, Sikh-state separatist movement almost from the start in the 1980s. The murder of Jagat Narain, the elderly founder, in September 1981 marked a beginning of thousands of killings. Jagat Narain's son and successor was murdered in 1984, and between 1989 and 1993 secessionist groups targeted anyone connected with Hind

⁷² *HIE*, 2 July 1994, p. 3. My source here is the weekly *Hindu*, but the treatment was no more extensive in daily editions.

⁷³ *IT*, 15 June 1995, p. 21. *Frontline*, 29 December 1995, pp. 130-2.

Samachar newspapers, even the hawkers. As we saw, more than sixty of the newspaper's people were killed in less than four years.⁷⁴

The experience of Hind Samachar illustrated the capacity of Indian-language newspapers to touch people's hearts and souls. Because they were conducted in languages which were often at the centre of dispute, newspapers became participants themselves. The Hind Samachar company published an Urdu, a Hindi and a Gurmukhi daily. During the campaign of murder against its employees in 1989-92 all three papers were affected, but the Gurmukhi daily, *Jag Bani*, was affected the worst. Its circulation fell from 94,000 to 48,000 in the second half of 1989.⁷⁵ *Jag Bani* was a double insult to the Khalistan insurgents; not only did it denounce them and report unfavourably on everything they did, but it was written in Gurmukhi, the script that Khalistanis regarded as closely linked to the Sikh religion and the "national language" of an eventual sovereign state of Khalistan.

On India's extremities where secessionist movements often thrived – in Kashmir in the north and in far northeastern India – newspapers and their employees felt similar pressures.⁷⁶ The small, distant revolts against the Indian state in the northeast proved intensely dangerous for journalists on the spot – "journalists of a lesser dateline", as the headline on an account by Sanjoy Hazarika dubbed them. In the northeast, Hazarika wrote, "a mistake may prove extremely costly. One may not even hear of what happens to the person who committed that 'mistake'." Referring to the outcry that followed the attack on journalists in New Delhi by followers of the Dalit politician Kanshi Ram in 1996, Hazarika asked, "Do you think it would have merited more than passing reference in the metropolitan newspapers [if it had happened] in a remote area like the North-East?" He knew it would not.⁷⁷

In the mid-1990s, the dangers were most clearly seen in Kashmir where the insurgency against the Indian state began in 1989. "Srinagar newspapers", reported the *Hindustan Times* in May 1996,

⁷⁴ "People associated with Hind Samachar killed by terrorists", typewritten, photocopied list, on which the last death is 31 January 1993. Given to me at Hind Samachar offices, Jalandhar, 21 May 1993.,

⁷⁵ *ABC July-December 1989*.

⁷⁶ Nepali newspapers in northern West Bengal ran into trouble with the Gurkha National Liberation Front in early 1998. *Hindustan Times*, 27 March 1998 [<http://www.hindustantimes.com/ht/nonfram/279398/detsta09.htm>] and *Indian Express*, 16 April 1998 [<http://www.expressindia.com/ie/daily.19980416/10650324.html>]. For the multiple dangers in Assam, see *Hindustan Times*, 27 October 1998 [<http://www.hindustantimes.com/nonfram/271098>], *Indian Express*, 27 October 1998 [<http://www.indian-express.com/ie/daily/19981027>], *HIE*, 25 July 1998 and 1 August 1998.

⁷⁷ *Indian Express*, 4 November 1996 [<http://express.india-world.com/ie/daily>].

have decided to suspend publication ..., following the receipt of simultaneous communications from the Government ... [and] the Hizbul Mujahideen [separatist insurgents]. The Government cautioned the editors that they would have to face legal proceedings, if they published threats issued by the militant groups.[...] The Hizbul Mujahideen, on the other hand, enjoined editors not to publish Government advertisements and Press notes.⁷⁸

Small newspapers and their employees were vulnerable to both sides. Who in New Delhi in the mid-1990s would remember Mohammad Shaban "Vakil", editor of *Al Safa*, an Urdu daily in Srinagar? At the time of his murder in his office in April 1991, he was fighting six cases laid by the Kashmir police for "objectionable writing" and had been denied government advertising. But his killers appear to have come from the insurgents, angry that he criticized their methods and programs.⁷⁹ "Vakil" had done what, it is sometimes said, good journalists do: offended both sides.

People working for large English-language news organizations in Kashmir were also exposed, but their prominence gave them some protection. Yusuf Jameel, who worked for the BBC, escaped death in a letter-bomb attack that killed a colleague; but Jameel won international awards and had overseas friends looking for ways to help him. Unlike the editor of *Madhya Yug*, Jameel would at least have been internationally mourned if he had died.⁸⁰ In Kashmir a number of journalists were killed; kidnapping was a hazard of the job; and it was widely believed that Urdu newspapers had no alternative but "to toe the line dictated by the militant groups".⁸¹ After being kidnapped in 1996, one journalist reported that "this was the third time I have been threatened by different parties in Kashmir's conflict" – once by the Central Reserve Police and by two different insurgent groups.⁸²

It would be misguided to romanticize the bravery of small-town Indian-language newspapers and their employees. What we need to recognize is their vulnerability, which may lead them to be brave or compliant or both, depending on the day and the circumstances. The same circumstances – isolation, the power to publish words that go to

⁷⁸ *Hindustan Times*, 5 May 1996, p. 12.

⁷⁹ *Crisis and Credibility: Report of the Press Council of India. January and July 1991* (New Delhi: Lancer International, 1991), pp. 64-5.

⁸⁰ *Indian Express*, 28 November 1996 [<http://express.indiaworld.co.in/ie/daily/>]. Jameel's Australian friends looked for ways to get him out of Kashmir for a time at least. I know this from discussions in Melbourne. Jameel had also been abducted at one point by the Indian military. *Crisis and Credibility*, p. 70.

⁸¹ *Hindustan Times*, 5 May 1996, p. 12. *HIE*, 20 July 1996, p. 5.

⁸² *Frontline*, 9 August 1996, pp. 44-5. The journalist was George Joseph, then working as a correspondent for an international television company, TVI.

people's hearts and souls – also give journalists opportunities to extract benefits.

Travelling down the Kerala coast from Calicut to Trivandrum in 1993, I collected more than fifty very small evening or weekly Malayalam newspapers. Their names were more stylish than their production, which usually consisted of a single broadsheet page, printed as a four-page tabloid. For most of them, the quality of the newsprint, the printing and the reporting were dismal. But the names were memorable: "Freelance" (Trivandrum), "Venad Moonlight" (Trivandrum), "Watergate" (Pattanamthitha), "Latest" (Kanhagad), "Explosion" (Cannanore), "Lightning" (Quilon), "Riddle" (Tirur). Some were genuine attempts to put out newspapers aimed at the requirements of particular readers. Such was the old *Thaniniram* ("true colours") which enjoyed great popularity among government office-workers in Trivandrum in the early 1970s for its early afternoon publication, court reports and gossip about senior officials. It was banned during the "emergency", much to the relief, one suspects, of those senior officials.⁸³ Most of the one-sheet tabloids, however, aimed to capitalize on the latent power of the press – the ability of print to impress and to frighten.⁸⁴

"The racketeer's sheet ... abound[s] in provincial capitals and district headquarters," wrote T.J.S. George in 1967, "for provincial governments are easily persuaded to divert public money into private channels."⁸⁵ George was in a position to know: he had been editing *Searchlight*, an English daily of Patna, capital of Bihar. But if Indian-language newspapers and their employees were so vulnerable, why should a "racketeer's sheet" have much influence? Why should people fear it and perhaps pay off its owners and workers? A news item captures the fact that newspapers and journalists are simultaneously powerful and vulnerable:

... a thirty-five-year-old freelance journalist was arrested under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Act by police on Monday on charges of kidnapping and extortion. The arrest was made after a builder lodged a complaint ...⁸⁶

We can interpret the item in various ways. It may be that a courageous young journalist was exposing the illegal activities of an unscrupulous contractor who used his influence with corrupt local police to have the

⁸³ *Thaniniram* appeared most afternoons in the English Records section of the Kerala Secretariat when I was doing research there in 1971 and 1974.

⁸⁴ Similar tiny newspapers produced for "small-time gains" were also common in small towns of Gujarat and Maharashtra. *IT*, 15 December 1994, p. 11 and *SW*, 25 June 1994, p. 6. I am grateful to Sue Chaplin for bringing the Gujarati examples to my attention.

⁸⁵ George, *Provincial Press*, pp. 6-7.

⁸⁶ *Indian Express* (Cochin), 14 April 1993, p. 10.

journalist put in prison. On the other hand, the journalist may have been blackmailing the contractor by threatening to publish false stories about him and his business. Or perhaps “freelance journalist” was simply a convenient label covering a range of legal and illegal activities. The point is that small newspapers and the people associated with them may be perpetrators as well as victims.

How do such processes work? First, newspapers can be used for simple blackmail or extortion: pay me something, or do something for me, or else I shall publish something bad about you; or, if you do these things for me, I shall publish something good about you. Such reports can be important for the prospects of government servants. For example, in Kerala (and no doubt other states) the Public Relations Department monitored small newspapers and brought allegations against officials to the attention of superiors. A bad report could at least necessitate annoying explanations and at worse affect a person’s career.⁸⁷

A case before the Press Council of India illustrated the process. A Hindi daily, *Amrit Varsha*, in Dhanbad in Bihar attacked an inspector in the local factory of the Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL). The newspaper accused him of “encouraging the mafia culture”, of being “a drunkard”, of posing a threat to “daughters and daughters-in-law” and of having a daughter himself who was engaged in an “illicit relation with a boy of a south Indian family staying in Dhanbad”. When the Press Council took up the complaint, the newspaper did not reply. Having made inquiries with the local police, the Press Council eventually censured the newspaper.⁸⁸ However, the censure carried no penalty and was unlikely to have made much impact on the citizens of Dhanbad. For journalists or proprietors the danger of provocative allegations or outright blackmail was that they might provoke unpleasant reactions from someone whose power the newspaper underestimated. The Press Council of India was not much to be feared; but someone with friends in the police, willing to activate the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Act, was.

There were safer ways to prosper as a small-town proprietor or journalist. To be recognized as a newspaper brought various benefits from state and national governments. In the past a registered newspaper was entitled to a quota of scarce newsprint, part of which might then be sold at a profit in the black market. Secondly, a registered newspaper

⁸⁷ Interviews, Praveen, Correspondent, the *Hindu*, Trivandrum, 14 April 1993, and V.K. Narayanan, Additional Director, Public Relations Department, Government of Kerala, Trivandrum, 17 April 1993.

⁸⁸ *Press Council of India Review*, vol. 13, no. 3 (July 1992), pp. 122-4. See Vidura, vol. 29, no. 1 (March 1992), p. 37, for a similar censure passed against a Hindi daily of Delhi for trying to blackmail the All-India Rice Exporters’ Association and some of its members.

automatically got government advertising. In Kerala in 1993 a circulation of 3,000 put a daily in this category. There were more than fifty such dailies, the smallest of which were paid at only Rs 5 a column centimetre for government advertisements. *Malayala Manorama* got Rs 237 and *Mathrubhumi*, Rs 216.⁸⁹ But a regular 40 or 50 centimetres a day added up to a reliable source of cash, and if a newspaper had few other expenses, an owner-editor was on the way to making a living.

And expenses might indeed be low. T.J.S. George found a Hindi daily in Patna with "four different-dated issues" which "purported to be for 21, 22, 23 and 24 September 1965". But each issue carried "the same news, headlines, pictures and advertisements". The publisher printed a few dozen copies of each date, lodged them with sleepy, sympathetic record-keepers and drew his quota of advertisements, not to mention newsprint, of which he must have enjoyed a valuable surplus.⁹⁰

Various other benefits flowed to journalists and newspaper proprietors. Once accredited, they were entitled in many states to free travel and access to government buildings (where officials could be consulted about permits, files, land titles etc.), subsidized housing and sometimes to land itself.⁹¹ "About 200 journalists are expected to get large plots of land at prices about 40 per cent below the market value", *India Today* wrote of such a transaction in Lucknow in 1984, "and without the long and anxious wait less privileged people have to endure."⁹² Some politicians went to great lengths to buy up the press. As Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in 1995-6, Mulayam Singh Yadav was reported to have spent more than Rs 10 million on favours to proprietors and journalists. These varied from amounts of Rs 500,000 to press clubs in rural districts like Mainpuri and Etawah to grants of Rs 75,000 to individual journalists.⁹³ The Press Council set out to investigate such favours. The chairman asked: "How can the media expose corruption when it itself is corrupt?" But the weapons available to the Council reflected the bemused bureaucratic techniques characteristic of government attempts to control the press since independence:

Questionnaires had been sent to all state governments asking them to provide information about the types of facilities provided by them to newspaper owners and journalists.

⁸⁹ "Government of Kerala. Public Relations Department. Media list of dailies (1992-93)", cyclostyled, 3 pages, given to me at the Secretariat in Trivandrum, April 1993.

⁹⁰ George, *Provincial Press*, pp. 6-7.

⁹¹ Interview, V. K. Narayanan, 17 April 1993.

⁹² *IT*, 31 May 1984, p. 49.

⁹³ *Organiser*, 30 July 1995, p. 10, quoting the *Statesman*, 15 July 1995. The *Organiser*, organ of the Bharatiya Janata Party, had great fun with these revelations. See also *Organiser*, 10 September 1995, p. 6.

The Madhya Pradesh government had replied ..., [but] the answers did not entirely reflect the reality.⁹⁴

Such measures were not likely to limit the power of the press to make owners and journalists richer and more influential.

Various equations of control affect Indian-language newspapers. Governments seek to interpret and impose standards of “good taste” and to prevent social and political unrest. Politicians, political insurgents and criminals attempt to have newspapers tell only their versions of events. For owners and journalists such pressures can bring disaster and death; but for those who choose, cosy relationships can develop in which journalists and proprietors willingly accept – indeed, seek – patrons. At its extreme, the newspaper becomes a mechanism for extracting payments and benefits. The perceived power of the newspaper allows those who appear to control it to demand rewards. Within a newspaper itself owners strive to ensure that their newspaper reflects their views, not those of their reporters and employees. In this they usually win, as we saw in Chapter 6. Ultimately, if it is a genuine newspaper and dependent on circulation, readers themselves exercise control by taking their money elsewhere if a newspaper no longer appeals to them. Advertisers follow.

As the Indian-language press grew, struggles for control extended over ever-widening areas. These contests were innovations. Where once there was a virtual silence – or the whispered conversation of a few – the newspaper revolution now meant that large numbers of people spoke and even larger numbers listened, not merely in cities, but in towns and villages. This spreading conversation made it all the more important for various interests to try to influence and control what was said. With this growing eagerness to control went a growing prospect for journalists and proprietors to gain or suffer. These struggles suggested that ideas about the right of individuals to be heard – and people’s eagerness to know what was being said – were spreading. To control or influence people affected by newly meaningful words, like “individual”, “public” and “consumer”, became a goal for those seeking power and wealth. Indian-language newspapers were at the centre – they were the essence – of the struggle. Once the Press Club of Mainpuri may have seemed a distant joke. By the 1990s a Chief Minister judged the good opinion of Mainpuri’s journalists to be worth Rs 500,000.

8

CONCLUSION

Four broad questions, larger than the newspaper business itself, have loomed over this study. The first is the relationship between capitalism and printing, particularly the printing of newspapers; the second, the place of newspapers in creating a “public sphere”, a field in which people previously excluded from decisions – from politics – find opportunity to influence affairs that once were decided for them; and the third, the role that print plays in the making of “nationalism”. Sailing above all these is the future-gazing puzzle: what happens when print and television arrive in a culture *simultaneously*?

Capitalism

The expansion of capitalism in India can probably be seen more concretely in the newspaper industry than anywhere else. Alert travellers in the 1990s constantly encountered physical manifestations of newspapers – buildings, billboards, hawkers, stalls and newspapers themselves, often recycled into wrapping paper and packages. Travellers also encountered less measurable consequences attributable, or done with an eye, to newspapers – public meetings, delegations, protests, election campaigns; tyrannous landlords who affected meekness;¹ policemen punctilious about being seen not to beat villagers. Newspapers, like capitalism in India, were not all-pervasive, but they went where they had not gone before and various aspects of life changed as a result.

Indeed, the development of Indian-language newspapers provides a thermometer for taking the temperature of Indian capitalism. At the time of independence in 1947 Indian capitalists existed, although they did not dominate an economy still heavily agricultural and “semi-feudal”, based on exchange, patronage and dependence as much as on wages, profit and markets. To be sure, the extent of capitalist relations in agriculture varied greatly from one region to another; but it is safe to say that peasants who grew food to eat and to present to their landholding superiors

¹ See P. Sainath, *Everybody Loves a Good Drought* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1996), pp. 257-60, for the encounter between a journalist and a cautious landlord in Bihar.

were more common than farmers who grew solely for the market. India already had capitalist enterprises in cities, and the “socialism” of Indian governments between 1951 and 1991 did not destroy such capitalism. Indeed, some businesses prospered in a safe, sheltered environment. For families that owned an Indian-language newspaper, a living was to be made, but rarely was it a business to aspire to. Families stayed in it because there were few alternatives.

Forces promoting capitalist relations grew in the 1960s. The “green revolution” in agriculture drew hundreds of thousands of cultivating families into full capitalist agriculture – paying wages, seeking profits and growing for sale and market, not for cooking pot and home. At the same time, tens of thousands of Indians migrated, first to Britain, then to the United States and Canada. Their remittances, visits and gifts fostered aspirations for material goods to make life easier and pressure for economic change to deliver such goods.

A landmark for newspapers in this process was the first National Readership Survey (NRS-I), conducted in 1970, which hinted at the latent purchasing power of small-town India.² It also underlined the uncertainty of most Indian-language newspapers about how to confront the potential magnetism of advertising revenue. Nilakantha Khadilkar, owner and editor of *Navakal*, sometimes in the 1990s the largest circulating daily in Marathi, deplored the pressure to change:

The change came after independence.[...] Th[e] whole mission [was] lost ... once [freedom was] achieved. That purpose [was] over.[...] And now the profit motive [got] in.[...] Now the time was propitious for capitalists to come in ..., people who made money during the independence struggle ... invested it in newspapers.

Some owner-editors like Khadilkar regretted the loss of the sense of “mission” that they believed characterized the newspapers of the independence struggle. “Journalism in the days of my grandfather was missionary”, he said, “and also in the days of my father.” But under his father in the 1950s, *Navakal*’s circulation had fallen to 800 and the paper nearly closed.³ To survive, Khadilkar had to master the economics and techniques of the newspaper industry – from the pricing of newsprint to the maintenance of offset presses. In Kerala, *Malayala Manorama* and *Mathrubhumi* foreshadowed widespread competition for readers and advertisers when they invaded each other’s territory in the 1960s. When Mrs Gandhi’s “emergency” began in 1975, similar buds were sprouting elsewhere. Ramoji Rao founded *Eenadu* in Andhra Pradesh in 1974. Kanpur’s *Dainik Jagran* started its Gorakhpur edition in 1975.

² See Robin Jeffrey, “Monitoring Newspapers and Understanding the State: India, 1948-93”, *Asian Survey*, vol. 34, no. 9 (September 1994), pp. 748-63.

³ Interview, Nilakantha Khadilkar, Owner and Editor, *Navakal*, Mumbai, 30 April 1993.

The end of the “emergency” and the slow relaxation of economic controls forced Indian-language newspapers to embrace capitalism simply in order to survive. The technology that enabled them to reach new readers in remote areas became both available and essential. Expanding newspapers carried capitalist practices with them. *Eenadu*’s real estate and marriage advertisements, and relentless marketing teams, dramatized Anderson’s truism about books and newspapers being “the first modern-style mass-produced industrial commodity”.⁴

Eenadu’s marriage advertisements, proudly proclaimed by its marketing division, exemplified a process found elsewhere: increasing dependence of newspapers on advertising. The long-term outcomes may not have been especially desirable. In the United States in the early 1980s, more than three-quarters of newspaper revenues came from advertising.⁵ Dependence on advertising led to concentration of ownership. Big circulations brought big investments from national advertisers. Big newspapers could afford to grow bigger by underselling their smaller rivals and putting out bigger newspapers with more promotions and, sometimes, more news. “Mass advertisers”, Bagdikian wrote, “have been the basic cause of monopoly newspapers in the United States.”⁶

Nevertheless, the capitalism, which compelled newspapers to find new readers in order to gain advertisers and raise advertising rates, carried other effects of print, as surely as flooding rivers carry silt. Local news, which was the staple of success for Indian-language newspapers, publicized people and issues which in the past would have been ignored. A “public sphere” is based on such “public”-ity, and the fact that such publicity became more common and accessible changed the nature of Indian politics. Other capitalist societies have passed down a similar path: capitalism needs newspapers; newspapers spread to respond to capitalism; and in doing so, they help to make people into both consumers and citizens.

The growth of a few dozen larger newspapers in Indian languages, according to one view, “encouraged standardisation and destroyed diversity of information and public opinion” and “pre-empted the growth of small local newspapers”.⁷ The argument that “small local newspapers”, struggling in worthy penury, were throttled by the expansion of larger newspapers in the 1980s is not convincing. Many of the latter were themselves small and local at the end of the “emergency”. If they had

⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 38.

⁵ Bagdikian, *Media Monopoly*, p. 121.

⁶ Ibid., p. 120. Sotiron, *From Politics to Profit*, p. 3, points out that in Canada by the 1990s every daily newspaper was owned by a chain.

⁷ Tara S. Nair, “Jeffrey’s Reading of Malayalam Press: a Blindfold Stab?”, *EPW*, 30 August 1997, p. 2186.

not grown, it is far from certain that other, more worthy newspapers would have arisen in their place. However unreliable the figures of the Registrar of Newspapers may be, it is worth pointing out that 602 dailies reported to him in 1976 and 1,056 in 1995.⁸ Still, evidence from other countries suggests that concentration of ownership is ultimately part of newspaper-capitalism. Will India then excel Gannett and other US chains by creating not just “one-paper towns” but “one-paper regions”?

In the 1990s, the industry was still sufficiently open to tempt capitalists, eager for dignity and apparent influence, to start new newspapers. Examples were obvious. *Rashtriya Sahara*, the Hindi daily begun in 1991 by Subrata Rai, owner of a profitable lending and investment institution, was one; *Vaaritha*, the Telugu daily started in 1996 by the Sanghi family to challenge *Eenadu*, another.⁹ Even in the English-language press, where the *Times of India* began to establish a big lead over competitors, it had seven ABC-affiliated rivals in New Delhi alone, and six were prepared to compete with it in its stronghold of Mumbai.¹⁰

These were merely the English-language rivals of the *Times of India*. New Delhi had six ABC-affiliated Hindi dailies; Mumbai, a total of twenty ABC dailies in Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi, and Urdu.¹¹ India's diversity of languages and scripts may help to preserve diversity of newspaper ownership. It proved difficult to produce top-ranking newspapers in more than one script and language. No newspaper company in India owned the top-circulating daily outside the area of its own mother-tongue. The Bennett Coleman attempt to start a Gujarati daily in the early 1990s flopped. *Navbharat Times* of Bennett Coleman lost Hindi leadership to *Punjab Kesari* of Jalandhar in the mid-1980s. Even *Loksatta*, the Indian Express chain's Marathi daily, based in Mumbai, was sometimes surpassed in Marathi circulation by the idiosyncratic, family-produced *Navakal*.¹²

Why was this so? First, there were questions of commitment and understanding. A Gujarati proprietor stood or fell in Gujarat. A chain from Mumbai, on the other hand, may not have been deeply committed to the long campaign necessary to establish a newspaper in Gujarat

⁸ *PII*, 1977, pp. 41-2. *PII*, 1996, p. 27. The Registrar had records of 875 dailies in 1976 (p. 1) and 4,236 in 1995 (p. 124).

⁹ *A&M*, 16-30 June 1997, p. 78, 30 June 1998, pp. 14-15, and 15 August 1998, p. 1. *BI*, 8-21 April 1996, p. 147.

¹⁰ *ABC January-June 1997*. This excludes non-ABC dailies like the *Pioneer* and *National Herald*.

¹¹ *ABC January-June 1997*.

¹² In 1997, *Navakal* grew to 315,000 from its tiny Mumbai plant. *Loksatta* was just under 400,000 from Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur.

Conclusion

and make it grow. Similarly, an outside chain may not have the connections to understand issues and resist assaults – literally, sometimes – by local rivals. It may have appeared simple for a chain with plenty of capital to buy the best talent in a region and put it to work. But how to judge, subtly and accurately, who the most talented and effective journalists were? Outsiders may make poor judgements. A distinguished US journalist asserted: “You simply cannot cover a town (much less a region) if you don’t know it, understand it, and, probably love it.”¹³ Outside chains may also be tempted to cut costs by using extensive translation from other newspapers in the chain. And if the new enterprise or acquisition does not make money, the chain may quickly conclude that the potential return is not worth the necessary investment.

Restrictions on foreign ownership protected Indian newspapers from global media proprietors in the 1990s. But even if such laws were modified, the number of Indian languages, and the relative weakness in world terms of their consumer classes, lessened the immediate likelihood of sustained international interest in Indian-language publications. Seventy million Telugu-speakers may have represented low-level purchasing power to international marketeers, but they provided a profitable, all-absorbing market for Telugu capitalists and media people. They provided financial incentive to produce Telugu films, newspapers and television; but they were not yet so attractive a market as to command the attention of Conrad Black or Rupert Murdoch. Vultures don’t eat ants.

Moreover, no Indian newspaper company had listed on the stock exchange by 1998. In the United States and Britain, the owners of major newspapers began public issues of shares in the 1960s. Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation became a favourite for investors. Similarly, the Gannett chain in the United States, floated in 1967, went from ownership of twenty-eight dailies to ninety-three – and constantly growing profits – by 1985.¹⁴ Though Indian newspapers were trailblazing capitalism, their proprietors had not in the 1990s wanted or needed to take the next step – surrendering autonomy in return for capital. Many proprietorial families were still making a transition from traders to capitalists.

In the late 1990s, evidence of ownership concentration of Indian-language newspapers was patchy and inconclusive. In Kannada, Telugu, Bengali, Malayalam and English, it was possible to argue that clear leaders had emerged among daily newspapers – *Prajavani*, *Eenadu*,

¹³ Michael Gartner, former editor of the *Des Moines Register* and *Louisville Courier-Journal*, in Sig Gissler, “What Happens When Gannett Takes Over”, *Columbia Journalism Review*, November-December 1997, p. 43.

¹⁴ Bagdikian, *Media Monopoly*, pp. 73-4.

Ananda Bazar Patrika, *Malayala Manorama* and the *Times of India*. Yet only *Prajavani* in Kannada enjoyed an undisputed lead, more than twice as great a circulation as its nearest rival.¹⁵ The newspaper industry in Kannada, however, seemed to be in its infancy: real expansion and competition lay ahead, and *Prajavani*, on past performance, would not necessarily be the ablest in developing new readers.¹⁶ *Eenadu* had 78 per cent of ABC daily circulation in Telugu in 1996, but the appearance of a plausible rival in *Vaaritha*, produced from nine centres, reduced the share to 68 per cent in two years.¹⁷ Even in a region with as dynamic an enterprise as *Eenadu*, challenges were still possible.

A “market war”, as a newspaper marketing manager in Kerala described it, for advertisers and readers was fought as openly between Indian-language newspapers in the 1990s as struggles between Coke and Pepsi or McDonalds and KFC. The place of capitalism in the newspaper business could not have been demonstrated more explicitly. In Bengali, *Ananda Bazar Patrika* battled the younger *Bartaman*, founded in 1984. “*Ananda Bazar Patrika*, the oldest largest newspaper”, an advertisement for *Bartaman* proclaimed, “grew by 35,000 in readership in the last six years. *Bartaman*, a young and dynamic daily, however, grew by 505,000.”¹⁸ Where did this advertisement for *Bartaman* appear? In India’s leading journal of advertising and marketing, *A&M*. The aim of course was to convince “media planners” – people who bought advertising for national and international companies – of the better value of placing ads in *Bartaman*.¹⁹

In Kerala, *Malayala Manorama* and *Mathrubhumi* similarly struggled. *Malayala Manorama* had about half of ABC daily circulation in Malayalam in the mid-1990s, and the two papers trumpeted their merits to national advertisers with campaigns targeting each other.²⁰ After *Mathrubhumi* canvassed leading advertisers with claims of superior circulation among particular categories of readers, *Malayala Manorama* ridiculed *Mathrubhumi*’s data in a two-page advertisement: “Just imagine, to view the readership universe, our competitor used a MIRROR!” Another ad in the same war showed a man on all fours, wearing blinkers

¹⁵ 300,000 against *Samyukta Karnataka*’s 144,000. *ABC January-June 1997*.

¹⁶ Robin Jeffrey, “Kannada: ‘We Fake It There Is Competition’”, *EPW*, 22 March 1997, pp. 566-70.

¹⁷ *BI*, 8-21 April 1996, p. 147. *ABC July-December 1996* and *ABC January-June 1998*.

¹⁸ *Statesman*, 25 January 1997, p. 1 [punctuation added by the present author]. With 477,000 copies *Ananda Bazar Patrika* had only 40 per cent of ABC daily circulation in Bengali in 1997. *ABC January-June 1997*. *Bartaman* was second with 289,000. The readership figures refer to National Readership Survey V (NRS-V) of 1995.

¹⁹ *Pioneer*, USP Section, 20 November 1997, p. 1.

²⁰ *ABC January-June 1997*.

and a saddle: "Sadly, our competitor seems to believe that all media planners are ignorant, stubborn and dim-witted."²¹ *Mathrubhumi* replied lamely with a claim that its ad rates were 20 per cent lower and its "aggregate urban readership" was only 3.5 per cent less than *Malayala Manorama*'s. Therefore an ad in *Mathrubhumi* was better value.²²

These contests for the minds and purses of national advertisers drew ammunition from the twice-yearly statistics of the Audit Bureau of Circulations and the figures from readership surveys, two of which – rivals – were held in 1995.

The fact that competing groups sought to measure the media consumption and preferences of Indians indicated that the stakes were growing. On one side stood the print media – the Audit Bureau and the Indian Newspaper Society – and the long-established Advertising Agencies Association of India (AAAI). In 1995 and 1997, they conducted National Readership Surveys V and VI (NRS-V and NRS-VI) in conjunction with major market-research companies.²³ On the other side was a coalition of advertiser groups, the Media Research Users' Council (MRUC), which in 1995 attempted for the first time to survey rural as well as urban India and paid greater attention to television (IRS-95).²⁴ The MRUC conducted a second survey in 1998 (IRS-98).²⁵ Each side aimed to ensure that the surveys provided its backers with what they needed, and one analyst concluded, not surprisingly, that newspaper publishers would probably prefer (their own) National Readership Survey, but that advertisers would be more interested in the Indian Readership Survey.²⁶ In short, surveys asking questions that might show a drift

²¹ *A&M*, 15 October 1996, pp. 28-9 and 15 September 1996, pp. 12-13. A third ad in the series had a man, stretched between two chairs, asleep in pyjamas: "Unfortunately, this is how our competitor views a media planner at work." *A&M*, 30 September 1996, pp. 16-17.

²² *A&M*, 31 October 1996, p. 61.

²³ The market-research companies were IMRB, MARG, MODE and MRAS. *A&M*, 15 December 1995, pp. 51-61. For discussion of NRS-VI and IRS-98, see *A&M*, 1-15 May 1998, pp. 48-82. They planned another survey in 1999.

²⁴ *A&M*, 31 March 1996, p. 32. Interview, N. Murali, Joint Managing Director, *The Hindu*, Chennai, 18 January 1999. Interview, C. S. Karnik and Hormuzd D. Masani, Audit Bureau of Circulations, Mumbai, 28 January 1999. IRS-95 was run by the Operations Research Group (ORG). *PAYB*, 1996-7, p. 397c.

²⁵ *BI*, 9-22 March 1998, p. 89. *Hindu*, 19 October 1998, p. 14 [<http://www.webpage.com/hindu/daily/981019>]. Operations Research Group (ORG) and the Market and Research Bureau (MARG) carry out the field surveys for the Indian Readership Survey. The National Readership Survey planned to use MODE, Indian Market Research Bureau (IMRB) and A. C. Nielsen in 1999.

²⁶ Lynn de Souza of the advertising agency Trikaya Grey, in *A&M*, 15 October 1994, p. 34.

away from newspapers and towards television were not what the print media wanted to see.

Invariably such surveys provided data to support a wonderful variety of claims. Virtually every newspaper could find something outstanding – and accurate – to say about itself. A paper could declare itself, like the Hindi daily *Rashtriya Sahara*, “Undisputed Leader in Lucknow Region” and base the claim on ABC figures. Or, like the Tamil *Dinamalar*, it could claim a wider reach than its larger rival, *Dina Thanthi*, among high-income groups in Tamil Nadu outside Chennai, based on NRS-V. Or, like *Dainik Bhaskar*, the Bhopal-based Hindi daily that opened a Jaipur edition in 1997, it could simply assert that it was “India’s Fastest Growing Newspaper”.²⁷

Indian-language newspapers were deeply involved in these campaigns. They were doing what newspapers like *Ananda Bazar Patrika* and *Malayala Manorama* had worked on since the late 1970s: convincing major national advertisers that readers of Indian-language newspapers had substantial purchasing power. “A media-planner ... in ... Mumbai would not know the tastes, preferences or spending power of a saree shop-owner in Cochin,” an advertising executive explained. “Therefore it becomes imperative for ... [Indian-language newspapers] to address the media-planner/brand manager directly.”²⁸

The titles of the people – “media planner”, “brand manager” – and the activities in which they were engaged represented a disowning of ideas cherished by elements of the Indian elite throughout the twentieth century. Both the spirituality of Gandhi and the socialism of Nehru disapproved of consumer capitalism.²⁹ Reflecting broad change in India as a whole, the newspaper industry now bore out the fears of old-elite nationalists – “ceasing to be a mission and becoming a trade”.³⁰ But it was more than mere trade. Newspapers like *Eenadu* fed their classified advertisements by generating real-estate advertising where no such market for property previously existed. In doing so, they made the industry into what it had been in other places at other times: a trailblazer for capitalism.

²⁷ These examples come from a single issue of *A&M*, 16-30 June 1997, pp. 23, 39, 77

²⁸ Gopinath Menon of the firm Chaitra Leo Burnett in the *Pioneer*, USP, 20 November 1997, p. 1.

²⁹ “The Indian intelligentsia has an innate conviction that consumerism is somehow sinful.” Sevanti Ninan, *Through the Magic Window: Television and Change in India* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1995), p. 140.

³⁰ K.R. Seshagiri Rao (ed.), *Studies in the History of Telugu Journalism* (Delhi: Narla Shasthyabdaparthi Celebration Committee, 1968), p. xix.

A "public sphere"

"A million mutinies now" was what V. S. Naipaul called his 1990 book about re-visiting India after many years.³¹ The "million mutinies" – the fact that millions of Indians now rebelled in small ways against their circumstances – were possible because avenues for public protest unwound like rolls of newsprint. Indeed, such avenues opened up *on* rolls of newsprint. Newspapers enabled growing numbers of people to acquire the means and confidence to air grievances, demand remedies, organize action.

If people lack ways of communicating over time and space – i.e. they lack media – a "public sphere" is impossible. This amphitheatre of the mind – the "public sphere" – seems essential for the participation integral to democracy. At the time of independence, such a capacity to communicate was confined to a relatively small section of the population, mostly in the cities and disproportionately English-speaking. The newspaper revolution of the 1980s and 1990s provided the means by which a public sphere broadened to encompass tens of millions of people in small towns and the countryside.

Much of the small, urban-oriented elite of 1947 was genuinely committed to democratic principles. But it was unsure of how – indeed, it did not have the means – to incorporate the vast majority of rural country men and women into participation as citizens. Though the rural majority was not totally cut off from the institutions of political power – rural people voted in remarkable proportions and in some circumstances generated powerful protests – their participation in institutional decision-making was occasional and summoned-up, rather than continuous and self-propelled. It was a society in which physical isolation and social disparity supported concentration of wealth, particularly in land. Large pockets of India might have had the label "feudal" or "semi-feudal" applied to them: places where influential notables controlled the chief resources – land and people – and where their dependents, having few alternatives, bestowed on them great deference. Politics in such localities depended heavily on eliciting the support of local bigwigs. Such pockets still existed in the 1990s, but they were far fewer and shrinking.

The spread of newspapers expanded the participation of people in events affecting them. One could almost visualize a metaphorical "deal": we, small-town and country people, will read your newspaper and perhaps buy your products, but only if you will let us read about ourselves. Thus, to serve their own ends, newspapers played a major role in creating the conditions for an expanded public sphere: they reported extensively on matters close to people's homes and hearts.

³¹ V.S. Naipaul, *A Million Mutinies Now* (London: Heinemann, 1990).

What evidence supports such assertions? The anti-arrack movement in Andhra Pradesh in the early 1990s seems a telling example. Similarly, when the middle-ranking police officer, with whose story this book began, realized that villagers now knew that the police were not supposed to beat them, he was encountering people who had become part of a public sphere, in which it was possible and effective to tell others, unknown, about one's griefs and problems.

Such public activity need not be liberal or benign. The above examples are propitious, even exhilarating. But "public" is not a synonym for "loving", "harmonious" or "wise." Newspapers in the 1980s "played a significant role", according to a group of journalists, "in promoting communal attitudes and practices".³² Much "public action" – the consolidation of religion-based and caste-based political parties, for example – would not have been expected or welcomed by a Nehru. Nevertheless, such developments represented a broadening of political involvement. By definition, a free-speech public sphere must be open to whatever comes – up to the nice philosophical point of how such an arena is to be protected against those who would use its liberty to destroy it.

Nationalism

"Peasants into Frenchmen" Eugen Weber called his book about the modernization of rural France in the late nineteenth century. The French language was spread "by newspaper and barracks [military conscription] even more than by school".³³ To what extent has India's newspaper revolution made peasants into Indians? Or has it in fact begun to make them, not into Indians but into Tamils and Oriyas, Gujaratis and Telugus? Does the newspaper revolution hasten the day of India's long-predicted balkanization?

My response connects directly to the capitalism that drives the newspaper revolution. As capitalist newspapers grow and their numbers shrink, proprietors are increasingly aware – none, it may be guessed, was ever in doubt – of the advantages of the Indian state. It provides them with status and markets. When they go to New Delhi, they are important people. When they are selling advertisements, they have all of India to canvass. Even without ideology and sentiment, the owners of major newspapers have reason to foster the idea of "the Indian nation". In part they have done this consciously. Their newspapers have been unlikely to carry denunciations of India or calls for separation. But

³² Mediawatch, "The Media and Communalism", *Social Action*, vol. 43 (April-June 1993), p. 210.

³³ Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: the Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford University Press, 1976), p. 84, quoting Albert Dauzat.

their newspapers have fostered “Indian-ness” in less obvious ways. In its format – its “package” – a newspaper provided a ballot on India, and readers voted each day when they bought or read it. The business pages featured Indian business; the sports pages focused on Indian sports; the weather focussed on Indian weather. Most newspapers offered “national” news and “national” commentators as explicitly defined categories. Newspapers not only presented daily content about “the nation”, but also, in their daily consumption, they provided a ritual, like going to mass or the temple. Citizens could see themselves sharing their day with people like themselves far away. In telling them about such people, their newspaper asserted that these sharers-of-breakfast were also Indians. “The National Daily in Malayalam”, *Mathrubhumi* announced in English across its masthead.

Successful nation-states are supported by a “national bourgeoisie”. Where an entrepreneurial middle-class grows – where there is capitalism – such groups will work to establish the legitimacy of the nation-state which nurtures them. Where capitalism is weak, ideas about local sovereignty and the injustice of existing state arrangements will be strong. Would not the political fragmentation of the once Soviet-controlled Eastern bloc support such an analysis? In Punjab, Kashmir and the northeast, where urban capitalism – and one of its clearest expressions, local newspapers – were weak or appeared to be in the hands of a minority group, disenchantment with the Indian state was strong. Elsewhere, where cities grew and commercial communities became capitalist bougeoisies, their activities included newspapers. The business people who ran those newspapers believed in the right-ness of the Indian state and espoused *Indian* nationalism. They did so partly because large markets were in their interests. But as they manufactured, travelled and marketed across India, they regularly experienced the grandeur of a great territorial entity, and the sense of that grandeur was established and reinforced in them. They accepted the existence of the entity “India” as both given and desirable.

We should not be surprised that among daily newspapers around the country there have been no champions of secession, or even aggressive critics of the Indian state. As we have seen, newspapers are vulnerable. They require substantial investment. Their presses are like sitting ducks for governments and mobs. Proprietors, moreover, tend to have two goals: to make a living, preferably a handsome one, and to enjoy the dignity and influence of owning a newspaper. Such dignity and influence often derive from their access to existing governments. Proprietors have made their newspapers hinges between their regions and the Indian state.

This is not to say that the “subliminal charge” of the Indian-language newspaper revolution may not ultimately promote “nationalism” and

demands for sovereign statehood in India's regions. Certainly, old-style nationalists would have expected so. "In the rebirth of a great people, long steeped in ignorance", wrote a Muslim of the Russian empire in the nineteenth century, celebrating the success of a newspaper, "the press will play a fundamental role."³⁴ The newspaper, another wrote, "is our national treasure ... our literature ... our national culture ..., our recent history ..., our museum ..., our university."³⁵ If newspapers provide such "national" foundations to languages, they may have an effect far more profound than overt and dangerous preaching about nationalism. Indeed, there is no reason proprietors should be conscious of the accumulated, day-to-day effects of their newspapers. It is possible that these effects could ultimately promote not the idea of "India" but that of other "great peoples" – Telugus, Gujaratis or whoever – currently straitjacketed within India's boundaries.

In its first phase, however, the newspaper revolution had not done so. Indeed, the spread of Telugu newspapers, for example, carried a consciousness of being an Indian just as much as a consciousness of being a Telugu. The newspaper saw itself as an Indian newspaper published in Telugu, just as *Mathrubhumi* saw itself as a national – that is, Indian – newspaper published in Malayalam.

Television and the future

Elsewhere in the world, industrialized countries experienced four or five generations of widespread literacy and familiarity with newspapers before television arrived in the 1950s and 1960s. Even then, television seemed to take a terrible toll on print. Evening newspapers died in North America and Britain in the 1960s and 1970s.³⁶ Although populations grew, newspaper circulations remained stagnant or fell.

If that was the effect among people long accustomed to newspaper consumption, people encountering print and television simultaneously might decide that literacy and print were unnecessary. Television alone would do. India, an Australian commentator mused, might "leap-frog over literacy" and become "a post-literate society just as it survives now as an illiterate one".³⁷

³⁴ Ismail bey Gasprinski, quoted in Alexandre Benningssen and Chantal Lemerrier Quelquejay, *La Presse et le Mouvement national chez les Musulmans de Russie avant 1920* (Paris: Mouton, 1964), p. ii. My translation from French.

³⁵ Osman Aqcoqragly in *ibid.*, p. 19.

³⁶ Commuter habits also changed in this time. Commuters on trains and buses read evening newspapers, as Mumbai's thriving evening newspapers attest. Commuters in cars listen to radio.

³⁷ Phillip Adams in *Weekend Australian*, 11-12 April 1998, p. 25.

In fact, however, the evidence that print and newspapers will survive and spread seems more positive than such superficial reading would allow. In English-speaking industrialized countries, newspapers may not have grown, but they have more than survived. In the United States, they made immense profits until the late 1980s, and surveys showed that two-thirds of households with television sets also bought newspapers; but less than a third of non-TV households subscribed to newspapers. British experience was similar.³⁸ It appears that once people begin to consume one medium, they become ripe to discover other media.

Publishing in India provides evidence. When Doordarshan, India's government television broadcaster, screened the popular *Mahabharata* serial on Sunday mornings in the late 1980s, the Telugu daily *Andhra Jyoti* bought the Telugu rights to the screenplay, translated the script from Hindi into Telugu and added between 40,000 and 50,000 copies to their Sunday sales. Telugus bought newspapers to understand television.³⁹ Similarly, the famed Tamil propensity for weekly magazines owed much to the spread of the Tamil film industry and movie-going habits of Tamils.⁴⁰ People read magazines to follow films and film stars. For Indian-language newspapers, able to adapt to and ride on it, television can be beneficial.

Newspapers can also count on the growth of literacy in Indian languages. It is slow, unstoppable and immense. Between 1991 and 2001, India's literate population will grow by more than the total population of Japan. In 1991, roughly 50 per cent of adults were literate; in 2001 the proportion will be at least 60 per cent. In ten years, something like 150 million literates will have been added to the 350 million literates of 1991. Literacy alone of course does not make people newspaper readers. The ability and desire to buy a newspaper are the other prerequisites. But the addition in a decade of 150 million people to the potential pool of newspaper buyers helps the odds for people who produce newspapers.

Literacy, moreover, was being gained not merely in the mother tongue but in the unique *script* of the mother-tongue. The market for Indian-language newspapers was thus divided into protected segments, which, as we have seen, may help to preserve diversity of ownership. Consider Punjab and Punjabi. By the 1990s, primary schools in Punjab had turned

³⁸ Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Information Machines* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1971), p. 58. Graham Murdock and Peter Golding, "The Structure, Ownership and Control of the Press, 1914-76" in George Boyce *et al.* (eds), *Newspaper History* (London: Constable, 1978), p. 133.

³⁹ Interview, Jagdish Prasad Kanuri, Managing Director, Andhra Printers, Hyderabad, 13 March 1993.

⁴⁰ Robin Jeffrey, "Tamil: 'Dominated by Cinema and Politics' ", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 8 February 1997, p. 255.

out hundreds of thousands of people comfortable in reading the Gurmukhi script. It was a guaranteed market for publishers of newspapers in Gurmukhi. The Hindu management of the Hind Samachar company, publishers of *Punjab Kesari* in Hindi and *Hind Samachar* in Urdu, thus made a careful business decision when it started *Jag Bani*, a Punjabi daily in Gurmukhi, in 1978, just over a decade after the creation of a Sikh-majority, Gurmukhi-promoting Punjab state.

Economic equations between newspapers and television will ultimately determine the shape of the Indian-language newspaper industry. To be sure, the share of newspapers in advertising expenditure will no doubt continue to fall. In 1983 print was estimated to get 78 per cent of India's total advertising expenditure and television 6 per cent. By 1994, the split was thought to be about 66 per cent to 25 per cent.⁴¹ But the volume of advertising, increasing at stunning annual rates of around 30 per cent in the early 1990s, will continue to grow, as rural India is enticed into the arms of consumerism. Similarly, the share of Indian languages in the expenditure on print advertising – albeit, difficult to calculate – will grow as advertisers and their agencies increasingly acknowledge that “advertising must be ethnocentric”.⁴² Subtlety of language and image is crucial.

India's variety of languages, and especially of scripts, thus provides protection. First, advertisers will find it difficult to bypass regional leaders. In the United States, an ad written for New York is likely to work in California. In India, an ad written in English is unintelligible to most people in Bengal or Tamil Nadu. So is an ad in Hindi. The “hinge function” of Indian-language newspapers will not be easily absorbed or bypassed by outsiders. Second, India's vast market, and the relative cheapness of putting out a newspaper, has meant that it was possible – though not easy – to produce newspapers that make a profit on their selling price. In the early 1990s, a selling price of 75 paise (about 2 cents in US currency) for four broadsheet pages left a proprietor with a small profit on each paper sold. Khadilkar's *Navakal* in Mumbai worked on such margins.⁴³ With such small newspapers, the reader paid more per sheet of paper, just as smokers paid more if they bought their cheap Charminar cigarettes one cigarette at a time. But many millions of Indians earned and lived from day to day. Moreover, fewer advertisements in such lean newspapers may mean that their reading

⁴¹ Vidura, vol. 25, no. 3 (May-June 1988), pp. 23-4. Lintas Media Guide: India (Mumbai: Lintas, 1995), p. 13, for 1994 estimate. Ninan, *Through the Magic Window*, p. 167 for 1992 figures of 67 per cent to 20 per cent.

⁴² Alyque Padamsee, chief executive of Lintas, in *PAYB*, 1996-7, p. 81a. See Malvika Singh on the same theme in *BI*, 4-17 November 1996, p. 83.

⁴³ Interview, Nilakantha Khadilkar, 30 April 1993.

content is not much less than that in a thicker, more advertisement-loaded broadsheet. Even the twin pressures of the need for advertising and the competition from television will not destroy opportunities for Indian-language newspapers emanating from parsimonious owners and ingenious writers.

The high cost of television production would also probably contribute to the continuing growth of Indian-language newspapers. Television news depends on vivid pictures of events. Stories with such footage get covered; stories without it make boring television and get less play. Yet newspaper proprietors know that *local* news makes circulation grow. Television in India in the 1990s was a long way, for example, from focusing on village campaigns for prohibition, as Telugu newspapers had done in 1992-3. Indian-language newspapers had just begun to tap the fascination that "the people" have in reading about themselves.

Similarly, only some forms of advertising suited television. Local advertising – witness the financial success of "free" community newspapers in English-speaking industrialized countries⁴⁴ – had yet to find a better medium than print. As more small-town enterprises adopted the techniques of global capitalism, local advertising had to grow. Newspapers like *Eenadu* tried to convince Telugus of the benefits of advertising through door-to-door, shop-to-shop sales of ads for all sorts of products and occasions. The success of newspapers like *Eenadu* in creating new categories of petty advertisers pointed to immense potential in small-town and rural India, where such advertising could foster Indian-language newspapers. Newspapers themselves could move into local television. In Bhavnagar in Gujarat, *Saurashtra Samachar*, a district-based daily, produced a nightly television news bulletin in 1999 which went to 50,000 sets connected to local cable operators and was well-supported by local advertisers.⁴⁵ We need to imagine Indian-language television and Indian-language newspapers not as individual runners in a sprint, but as a single (no doubt uncomfortable) participant in a three-legged race – linked and dependent.

"The multitude too familiar"

Bagdikian attributed the decline in circulation of US dailies after 1965 to the takeover of local newspapers by "national and multinational corporations". Such control "changed the form and content, the strategies of operation and the economics of newspapers" and "hastened the conversion of newspapers to primarily carriers of advertising". Losing touch with their communities, newspapers covered stories, not on the basis

⁴⁴ Advertising "throwaways" came to Calcutta in 1997. *SW*, 3 January 1998, p. 7.

⁴⁵ Interview, Pratap T. Shah, Editor, *Saurashtra Samachar*, Bhavnagar, 3 February 1999.

of the number of people who might be interested in them but whether stories would attract the affluent readers advertisers sought. What arose was an “unwanted American population” that is systematically discouraged by advertising-supported media”.⁴⁶ In India, as we have seen, Dalits formed the core of such an “unwanted” population, but tens of millions of other Indians also were too poor to interest an American-style media planner. However, because India’s population was so diverse, and the demographics so imperfectly understood and so rapidly changing, ambitious newspaper proprietors would seek increases in circulation wherever they could be found. Thus Indian-language newspapers would continue to engage broadly and deeply with their communities in ways that television would find hard to rival.

In this engagement Indian-language newspapers and the arrival of print that they heralded changed the nature of politics in ways that we are just beginning to ponder. The British sociologist John B. Thompson captured the process:

The changing nature of publicness – from the traditional publicness of copresence [i.e., people face-to-face] to the various forms of mediated publicness prevalent today [i.e., people reading about and viewing other people] – has profoundly altered the conditions under which political power is exercised.⁴⁷

Though people do not necessarily do what newspapers tell them to do, the reporting of an event in a particular way can produce dramatic responses. Moreover, newspapers and print carry deeper meaning – McLuhan’s “subliminal charge”. The fact that newspapers become part of life, changes life. That fact opens up new expectations about what is thinkable. More important, it opens up a new range of possibilities for influencing politics. This is not Habermas’ idealized eighteenth-century “public sphere” of rational debate; but it is fundamentally different from the limited expectations and political isolation of a less-than-wealthy peasant in a remote village. Newspapers, a courtier of the English King Charles II lamented, make “the multitude too familiar with the actions and counsels of their superiors”.⁴⁸ They also make the multitude aware – and this is the constructive side of the consumerism that newspapers bear – that the police are not supposed to beat them and that there are ways of making it hot for them if they do.

⁴⁶ Bagdikian, *Media Monopoly*, p. 199.

⁴⁷ Thompson, *Media and Modernity*, pp. 134-5. See also John B. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture* (Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 227-30.

⁴⁸ Roger L’Estrange in Turner, *Shocking History of Advertising*, p. 17.

EPILOGUE

THE REVOLUTION CONTINUES, 2000-9

Indian newspapers defy global trends. In the years after 2002, when newspaper circulations in the industrialized world shrank and newspapers closed, Indian newspapers expanded relentlessly. In analysing Indian media and particularly Indian-language newspapers, one detects two processes: those that seem truly universal – that unfold everywhere as material conditions, associated with capitalism, establish themselves – and those qualities that are uniquely Indian – the distinctive method and special ingredients that India adds to a general recipe of “modernity”. This chapter tries to engage with these broader questions as it surveys the Indian-language newspaper landscape in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The first story to tell is the story of growth, not merely in a single language and script but in thirteen languages written in eleven different scripts.¹ The constant exchange of information among these languages, within the boundaries of a single state, makes India unusual in the modern world. At first glance, such a multiplicity of languages should lead to division and fragmentation; but all-India newspaper institutions and networks, including news agencies, freelancing writers, enterprising translators and widespread syndication arrangements, spin a surprisingly unifying web.

To comprehend the continued growth of Indian-language newspapers, this Epilogue offers snapshots of the industry in five of the thirteen major languages. Each snapshot merits a book of its own (as do the eight other languages), but these brief accounts help identify the diversities and commonalities of the industry.²

¹ Assamese, Bengali, English, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu. Marathi and Hindi are written in the same script, as are Assamese and Bengali.

² The chapter does not deal with Urdu, perhaps the most intriguing of all, where circulations appear to have risen strongly in spite of the fact that the language and script are not widely taught in state schools. See Arshad Amanullah, “Is Urdu Journalism in India a Lost Battle?” in Ather Farouqui (ed.), *Muslims and Media Images: News versus Views* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 262-91. Telugu similarly shows strong increases and

Newspaper owners will endure losses that they would not tolerate in any other business, because of the influence and importance a newspaper appears to give them. There is no capitalist like a capitalist who owns a newspaper (this book, p. 115). However, in an era of phenomenal media change, newspaper ownership brings pressures as well as opportunities. The consumer capitalism that in part drives newspaper expansion has consequences: bad balance sheets eventually overwhelm even the most egotistical or ideological of owners. And owners who earn profits, as the old newspaper families are in business to do, compete intensely for the advertising that drives expansion.

According to critics, such competitive growth drives down “standards” and erodes ethics. The Epilogue ponders this proposition and reflects on academic discussions of “the public sphere”. Do expanding Indian media in fact fragment – even destroy – a once-unified “public sphere”? Or are public spheres, in the plural, being rapidly widened and deepened from what was once a shallow, narrow core? The Epilogue argues that political involvement is the other engine – along with consumer capitalism – that drags newspaper circulation behind it. As people become citizens caught up in political and social action, the appetite for information, and readiness to pay for it, grows. The dramatic increases in the circulation of Hindi dailies owe a great deal to the widening of political involvement in Hindi-speaking states over the past generation.

Behind these issues of growth, capitalism, standards and participation in politics lies the basic question: what are newspapers supposed to do? If it is “to have a voice that authentically reflects ... the entire community”,³ then Indian-language newspapers fail. Indian media still exclude tens of millions of citizens from key roles. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, newsrooms remain dominated by upper-caste men (this book, pp. 160-77). Though the role of women has grown, Dalits (Scheduled Castes) are only the rarest of presences. One can fairly confidently assert that in the next generation, in spite of the 2008 world recession, Indian-language newspapers, and other Indian-language media, will continue to grow; but social diversity in India’s newsrooms is far away.

a new daily, *Surya*, that says it speaks for “social development of backward classes”. Its chairman, however, was an unsuccessful candidate for the well-established Telugu Desam Party in the 2009 Lok Sabha elections. *The Week*, 28 June 2009, pp. 136-7 and *The Hindu*, 29 March 2003, <http://www.thehindu.com/2009/03/29/stories/20090329590603000.htm> (downloaded 28 August 2009).

³ David Yarnold, “Foreword”, in Arlene Notoro Morgan, Alice Irene Pifer and Keith Woods (eds), *The Authentic Voice: The Best Reporting on Race and Ethnicity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. xi-xii.

Growth and its causes

Between 2000 and 2007, if we accept raw calculations, the circulation of Indian daily newspapers grew by 66 per cent to exceed 95 million copies a day (Table 9.1). In the UK between 2001 and 2005, daily circulations fell by 10 per cent. In Europe as a whole, the estimate was a fall of more than 8 per cent and in the USA, a fall of 4 per cent.⁴ In 2008-9 alone, five US dailies, including the *Christian Science Monitor*, closed their print versions or shut down completely. Even newspapers like the *Boston Globe* were in jeopardy.⁵ And this was before the global economic crisis of 2008 had begun to take effect.

In India, circulation increases of daily newspapers have occurred in twelve languages, written in ten different scripts.⁶ Even in the smallest of these languages, Assamese, proprietors claimed have sold more than 600,000 papers a day in 2007. In Hindi, the national language, sales exceeded 40 million a day and had increased by more than 65 per cent between 2000 and 2007. Figure 9.1 dramatizes the rise in daily circulations in all languages over the fifteen-year period from 1990 to 2004. (Table 9.1 updates a similar Table A on p. xv of the last edition of this book). Figure 9.2, which excludes Hindi and English, highlights the growth that has occurred even in the "smaller" languages from 2000 to 2007. By comparison, total circulation of newspapers in Australia (population about 22 million) is about 2.9 million copies a day, which would place it ahead of Assamese, Kannada, Punjabi and Tamil, but behind the rest.⁷

Even though newspaper industries elsewhere in the world are in crisis, growth in India's newspaper industry seems easy to explain. India had more than 650 million literates by 2001 – an addition of 200 million literates in ten years.⁸ At the same time, the economic liberalization that gained momentum from 1991 expanded the middle class, introduced a wide range of competing

⁴ Timothy Balding, director-general, World Association of Newspapers, presentation to 59th World Newspaper Congress, Gothenburg, June 2006, www.extranet.anj.org.br/palestras/cbj2006/timothy_balding.ppt.

⁵ "Another US Newspaper Closure: Tucson Citizen Prints its Last Edition", 18 May 2009, <http://editorsweblog.org> (downloaded 15 June 2009).

⁶ Only Punjabi records a slight fall, which has various possible explanations, including anomalous data and the demographic limitations of the Gurmukhi script which, though the official script of the state of Punjab, is also the script of the religious texts of Sikhs. Anyone who knows Gurmukhi is very likely to know Hindi and its Devanagari script.

⁷ Jack R. Herman (ed.) *State of the News Print Media in Australia: 2007 Supplement to the 2006 report* (Sydney: Australia Press Council, 2007), pp. 14-15.

⁸ Based on calculation of 52 per cent literacy of a population of 846 million in 1991 and 65 per cent literacy of a population of 1,029 million in 2001.

Table 9.1. DAILY CIRCULATIONS BY LANGUAGE, 2000-7 ('000)

Language								Per cent growth
	2000	2001	2002-3	2003-4	2004-5	2005-6	2006-7	2000-7
Assamese	321	332	409	548	414	448	638	99%
Bengali	2,461	2,537	1,822	2,854	2,679	3,046	3,149	28%
English	7,851	8,512	10,000	8,978	10,771	12,915	13,257	69%
Gujarati	2,813	3,734	2,374	4,652	4,805	5,307	5,326	89%
Hindi	25,577	23,014	32,287	32,158	33,774	37,643	43,077	68%
Kannada	1,392	1,067	2,397	1,596	1,946	2,032	1,884	35%
Malayalam	2,976	2,992	3,192	3,438	3,151	3,193	3,576	20%
Marathi	4,485	4,148	5,292	4,865	5,227	5,897	6,091	36%
Oriya	2,057	2,039	2,839	2,656	2,912	3,215	3,116	51%
Punjabi	1,535	1,354	1,856	1,639	1,546	1,482	1,255	-18%
Tamil	1,740	1,914	2,053	1,912	2,129	2,010	2,734	57%
Telugu	1,682	1,651	3,059	2,730	2,902	3,895	5,728	241%
Urdu	3,614	3,029	4,625	4,664	5,279	6,003	7,083	96%
Total	58,504	56,323	72,205	72,690	77,535	87,086	96,914	66%

consumer goods and swelled the advertising industry. Why would newspaper circulations *not* have grown?⁹

These developments, however, coincided with a vast expansion of television: satellite channels arrived at the time of the First Gulf War in 1991. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, India had more than 300 general channels and 50 news channels.¹⁰ By 2009, more than half of India's people slept each night in a place with a television set: the country was estimated

⁹ The data must be treated like unreliable witnesses in a court case. If used carefully, they contribute to our understanding. These figures and tables, however, are based on the annual figures collected by the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI). We know that such figures are often inflated and unreliable. But the RNI figures are useful for illustrating trends, which are confirmed from other sources, such as the figures of the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) and those of both the National Readership Survey (NRS) and of the Indian Readership Survey (IRS). The expansionary trends are further evidenced by the investments of Indian newspaper proprietors who put their money where rewards seem likely: into expansion. For a discussion of the sources of such data, see Robin Jeffrey, "Monitoring Newspapers and Understanding the State: India, 1948-93", *Asian Survey*, vol. 34, no. 9 (September 1994), pp. 748-63.

¹⁰ Nalin Mehta, *India on Television* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2008), p. 1.

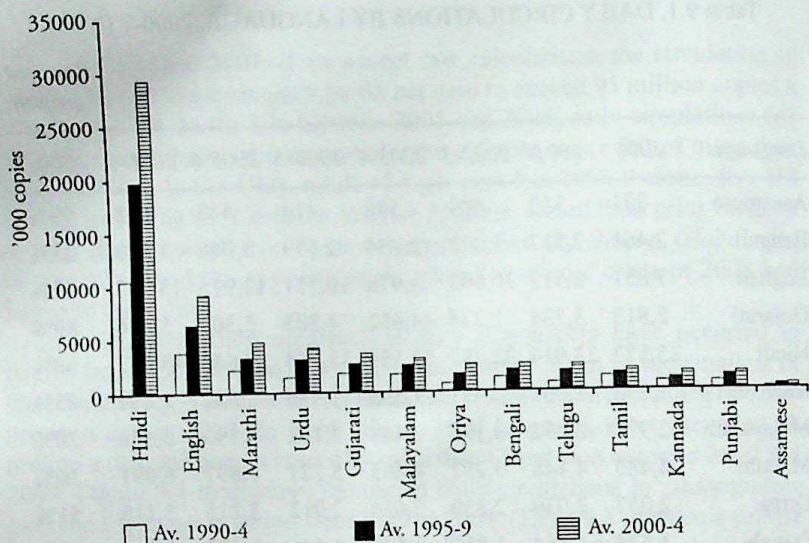


Figure 9.1.

AVERAGED DAILY CIRCULATIONS BY LANGUAGE, 1990-2004

Note: To minimize the effect of anomalies in the collection of the data, the figure averages circulations for three five-year periods.

to have 120 million television households.¹¹ In the state of Tamil Nadu, the DMK party promised free colour television sets to the poor as part of its 2006 election campaign, and by 2009 it claimed to have delivered more than 300,000 sets with another 400,000 on the way.¹² If the history of media in the West were anything to go by, would this growth of television not deliver a severe blow to the newspaper industry? For a number of reasons, it has not – yet – happened that way. The proposition that television promotes newspaper expansion seems valid still (this book, pp. 219-22).

¹¹ National Readership Survey 2006, in *The Hoot*, 13 June 2009 and available at <http://www.hindu.com/nic/nrs.htm>. Calculations are based on 112 million estimated television households in 2006 and a 3 per cent annual growth. A “household” is estimated to have 5.5 occupants.

¹² *The Hindu*, 3 January 2009, <http://www.hindu.com/2009/01/03/stories/2009010353860400.htm>. This helps to explain the fact that the growth of Tamil daily circulations is unspectacular. Tamil Nadu appears to have the greatest television density in India and largest absolute number of cable and satellite (C&S) homes. “Digital Edge”, *Indian Television*, 8 November 2008, <http://www.indiantelevision.com/headlines/y2k8/nov/nov94.php> (downloaded 21 August 2009), reported 66.5 million C&S homes of which 10.3 million were in Tamil Nadu, the largest number of all the states. See *Outlook*, 23 March 2009, pp. 12-13 for Tamil Nadu’s five politically affiliated channels.

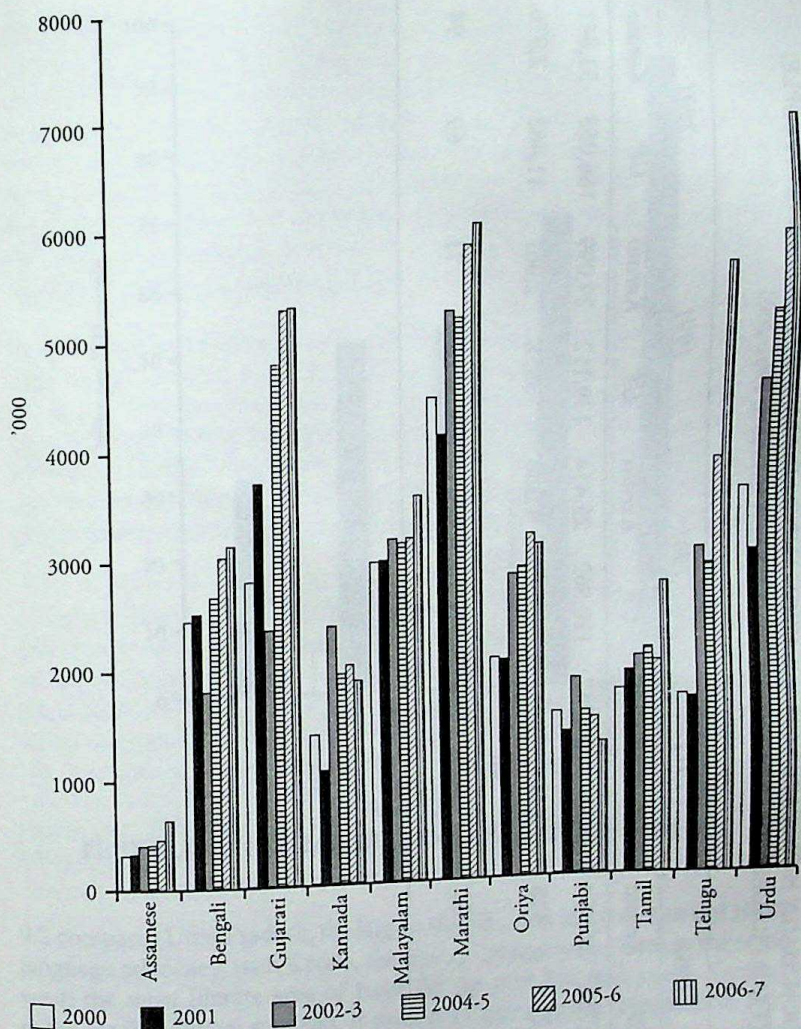


Figure 9.2.

DAILIES BY LANGUAGE 2000-7, EXCLUDING HINDI AND ENGLISH

Hindi

To gauge the impact of what has happened in Hindi, the national language with 500 million speakers, consider a rough-and-ready calculation.¹³ Table

¹³ This rough calculation overstates Hindi circulations because it includes dailies in *all* languages circulated in Uttar Pradesh, not simply Hindi dailies. In 1961, for example, the two largest circulating dailies in UP were both in English – *Northern India Patrika* (18,000)

Table 9.2. POPULATION, DAILY NEWSPAPER CIRCULATION AND DAILY NEWSPAPERS PER 1,000 PEOPLE,
UTTAR PRADESH (HINDI) AND KERALA (MALAYALAM), 1961-2001

	1961		1971		1981		1991		2001	
	UP	Kerala	UP	Kerala	UP	Kerala	UP	Kerala	UP	Kerala
Population in '000	73,755	16,904	88,341	21,347	110,862	25,454	139,112	29,099	166,053	31,841
Number of copies sold each day (in '000)	255	578	524	1,111	1,277	1,386	3858	2,061	11,465	2,976
Number of dailies sold per '000 people	4	32	6	52	12	54	28	71	69	94

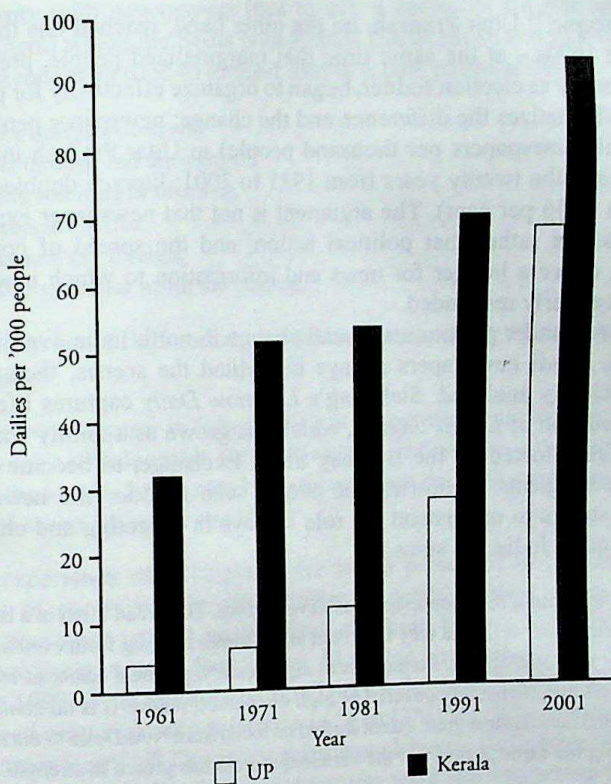


Figure 9.3.

PENETRATION: UTTAR PRADESH AND KERALA, 1961-2001

9.2 compares Uttar Pradesh, the largest state in India and the centre of Hindi-language advocacy, with Kerala, the Malayalam-speaking state in the south-west, the most literate area of India for the past hundred years. Kerala is noted for its political activism. It elected a Communist government in 1957, and its intense political competition is often credited with having produced superior quality-of-life results from the 1970s: politicized people extract services from the state. By 1971, Kerala had entered a mass-media era with daily-newspaper penetration rates exceeding fifty daily newspapers per

and *National Herald* (17,000). The largest Hindi daily was *Aj* of Varanasi (17,000). Today's giant, *Dainik Jagran*, in those days published only from Kanpur and sold 9,000 copies a day. In 2008, the ABC put *Dainik Jagran's* circulation at more than 2.3 million copies a day from 18 centres. *Annual Report of the Registrar of Newspapers for India, 1963, Part 1* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1963), pp. 303-8. ABC figures are from the data for the second half of 2008.

thousand people.¹⁴ Uttar Pradesh, on the other hand, reached this threshold only in the 1990s – at the same time that marginalized people, previously regarded merely as election fodder, began to organize effectively for politics. Figure 9.3 dramatizes the difference and the change: newspaper penetration (that is, daily newspapers per thousand people) in Uttar Pradesh increased by six times in the twenty years from 1981 to 2001; literacy doubled (from 27 per cent to 56 per cent). The argument is not that newspaper expansion led politics, but rather that political action, and the spread of consumer capitalism, drove a hunger for news and information to which newspaper proprietors eagerly responded.

When we ponder politics and social change in north India over the past generation, Hindi newspapers always lie behind the scenes, though they are insufficiently analysed. Stahlberg's *Lucknow Daily* captures life at the Lucknow edition of *Dainik Jagran*, which has grown as a family company, now carefully floated on the Bombay Stock Exchange, to become one of India's media giants. Following the people who produce the newspaper, Stahlberg strives to understand the role it plays in reflecting and changing society in north India. He sums up:

Today, people in India read newspapers as never before. They read them in a language that they understand well; and they may read about topics ranging from events in their own locality to world affairs. Perhaps most significantly, political issues at local and regional levels are intensively covered in high circulation media. It is no coincidence that politics in India has to a great extent shifted its focus from New Delhi to the regional centres during the same period that the vernacular press has grown in strength.¹⁵

As well as producing an engaging account of life and work, Stahlberg argues about the effect of the arrival of a daily newspaper on the lives of people who had previously not known it:

It offers a link between lived experiences and imaginations of other places and lives. A local newspaper inscribes nearby places, well-known persons and familiar events into a larger context. The local becomes part of a region, a nation and the world. The mundane is not far from the modern.¹⁶

Indeed, that "modern" world which takes shape from the time of the American, French and industrial revolutions is impossible without the newspaper. From at least the 1780s, the north Atlantic world developed a

¹⁴ Robin Jeffrey, "Testing Concepts about Print, Newspapers and Politics: Kerala, India, 1800-2007," *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 68, no. 2 (May 2009), pp. 467-8, for discussion of the labels "mass", "scarce" and "rare" media.

¹⁵ Per Stahlberg, *Lucknow Daily: How a Hindi Newspaper Constructs a Society* (Stockholm: Stockholm Studies in Social Anthropology, 2002), p. 3.

¹⁶ Stahlberg, *Lucknow Daily*, p. 13.

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familiarity with newspapers (not to say a contempt for and apprehension about them) which the Scots poet Robert Burns illustrated in a verse written for someone who tried to interest him in a new publication:

Your News and Review, sir,
I've read through and through, sir,
With little admiring or blaming;
The Papers are barren
Of home-news or foreign,
No murders or rapes worth the naming.¹⁷

Hegel was similarly familiar, though more respectful, when he wrote (about 1805) that

reading the newspaper in early morning is a kind of realistic morning prayer. One orients one's attitude against the world and toward God [in one case], or toward that which the world is [in the other]. The former gives the same security as the latter, in that one knows where one stands.¹⁸

This experience of having a wider world presented to you regularly on sheets of paper, which was familiar to north Atlantic elites more than 200 years ago, arrived in the Hindi-speaking belt of north India only in the last generation. Indeed, when Alok Rai wrote his *Hindi Nationalism* in the 1990s,¹⁹ he did not mention Hindi newspapers, and Hindi television received only a passing reference to "Zee [TV] Hindi", a grotesque cousin of "bazaar Hindi".²⁰ This is not surprising, because Rai's powerful tract was written at a time when Hindi newspapers were just beginning to become a truly mass medium.

Rai's point was that there was no universal "Hindi" that was commonly loved and spoken, even at the time that he wrote. There were local variants, each one of them used and valued by its speakers but none accepted as a standard. There was, to be sure, "official 'Hindi'", the unloved, divisive, Sanskritized creation of zealots.²¹ But a "standard Hindi" – respected by and intelligible to very large numbers of people, as modern Hebrew or Indonesian are respected and intelligible – had not evolved.

¹⁷ Robert Burns, "To Captain Riddell, Glenriddel, Extempore Lines on Returning a Newspaper", 1789, *The Poetical Works of Robert Burns* (London: Oxford University Press, 1916), p. 278.

¹⁸ Quoted in Susan Buck-Morss, "Hegel and Haiti.", *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 26, no. 4 (2000), p. 844, from Karl Rosenkranz, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegels Leben* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977, first published 1844), p. 543.

¹⁹ Alok Rai, *Hindi Nationalism* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2001).

²⁰ Rai, *Hindi Nationalism*, p. 119.

²¹ Ibid.

This appears to be changing. "Localisation's singular contribution," writes Sevanti Ninan, "has been to incorporate dialects into the language of district editions, mostly with the intention of endearing the publication to the local people, and making them think that it spoke their language." Added to this was "the extensive use of English ... 'We are trying to use *bol chaal ka bhasha* [the language of everyday use],' " an editor tells her.²²

In less than twenty years, Hindi newspapers have changed from being a scarce medium to a mass medium.²³ In so doing, they have begun to create an "acceptable" Hindi usage. Because they depend on winning the affection of their readers, they seek to create a daily-use Hindi that people will recognize and accept. In a promotional document intended to attract advertisers, *Dainik Jagran* explained its philosophy about language: "We believe that the Hindi dialect in India changes approximately every 25 kilometres. By publishing over 200 sub editions, we are able to use the dialect in each market and customise the content of the newspaper to reflect the interests of readers in each market."²⁴

Although this statement implies that the newspaper tailors its language for each of its scores of editions, in practice the various editions "speak" to each other constantly. Some phrases and standards come to be applied across the whole *Dainik Jagran* system, which now covers all of Hindi-speaking north India. In Hindi, this process has not yet gone as far as it had long ago in Bengali, Tamil, Telugu and even Kannada (see this book, p. 102). Neither of the two largest Hindi dailies, *Dainik Jagran* or *Dainik Bhaskar*, appears to have developed a systematic, printed style guide. In the Lucknow edition of *Dainik Jagran*, a senior reporter acted as an unofficial authority on matters of style and convention when Stahlberg worked at the paper, and a similar method was followed in the Bhopal edition of *Dainik Bhaskar*.²⁵ Nevertheless, the fact that these two dailies alone are producing close to five million copies a day across north India means that conventions of spelling, phrase and idiom are becoming widely known by a readership that has grown steadily for fifteen years (Figure 9.4).

Since the early 1990s, the transformation of politics in north India, particularly UP, has fascinated scholars, but little attention has been paid to the role of media, particularly newspapers. Lucia Michelutti, for example, raises expectations with the title of her in-depth study of politics in Mathura,

²² Sevanti Ninan, *Headlines from the Heartland: Reinventing the Hindi Public Sphere* (New Delhi: Sage, 2007), pp. 61-2.

²³ For a discussion of the significance of newspaper penetration, Jeffrey "Testing", pp. 465-89.

²⁴ Dainik Prakashan Ltd, Red Herring Prospectus, 10 January 2006, p. 11, <http://www.sebi.gov.in/dp/jagran.pdf> (downloaded 14 June 2009).

²⁵ Stahlberg, *Lucknow Daily*, pp. 100-1 and email to R. Jeffrey, 11 June 2009. Tabereh Neyazi, "Media Convergence and Hindi Newspapers: Changing Institutional and Discursive Dimensions, 1977-2007", PhD thesis, National University of Singapore, 2009, pp. 192-3.

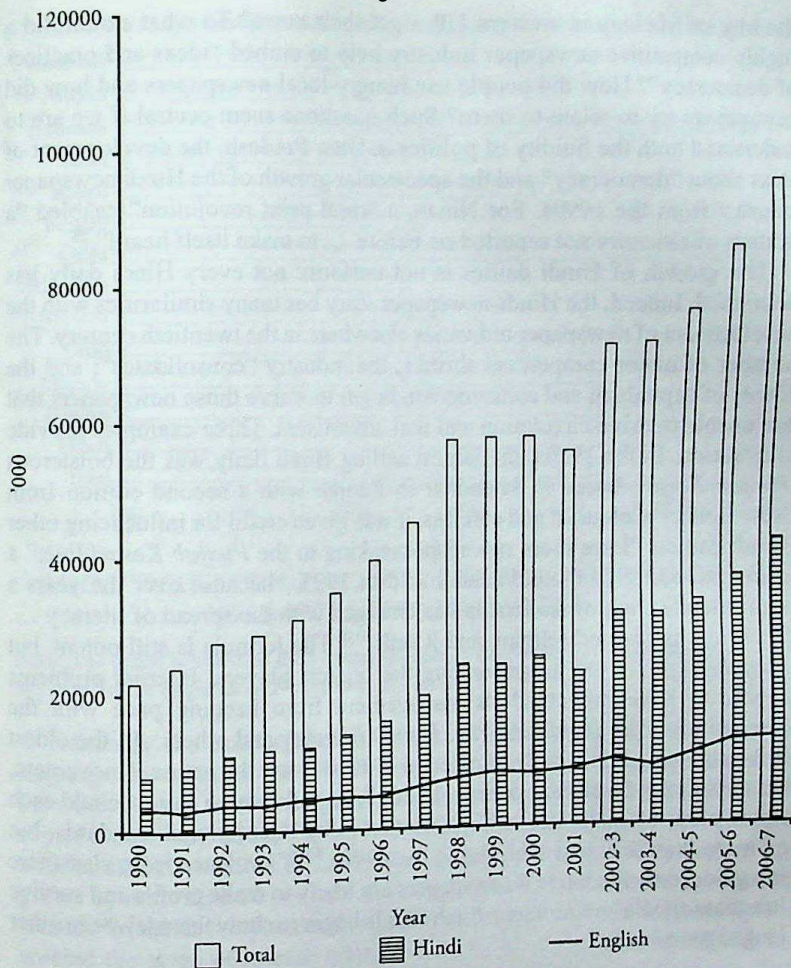


Figure 9.4.

DAILIES, 1990-2007: TOTAL, HINDI, ENGLISH

*The Vernacularisation of Democracy.*²⁶ “Vernacularisation” is “the process through which ideas and practices of democracy become embedded in particular cultural and social practices, and ... become entrenched in the consciousness of ordinary people.”²⁷ Though the book occasionally cites an item from the major daily, *Amar Ujala*, it does not ask questions that one might expect. Where did the subjects of the book – Yadavs living around

²⁶ Lucia Michelutti, *The Vernacularisation of Democracy: Politics, Caste and Religion in India* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2008).

²⁷ Michelutti, *Vernacularisation*, p. 217.

the city of Mathura in western UP – get their news? To what extent did a highly competitive newspaper industry help to embed “ideas and practices of democracy”? How did people use hungry local newspapers and how did newspapers try to relate to them? Such questions seem central if we are to understand both the fluidity of politics in Uttar Pradesh, the development of ideas about “democracy” and the spectacular growth of the Hindi newspaper industry from the 1990s. For Ninan, a “rural print revolution” enabled “a stratum of citizenry not reported on before ... to make itself heard”.²⁸

The growth of Hindi dailies is not uniform: not every Hindi daily has flourished. Indeed, the Hindi-newspaper story has many similarities with the development of newspaper industries elsewhere in the twentieth century. The number of major competitors shrinks; the industry “consolidates”; and the forces of capitalism and consumerism begin to starve those newspapers that are unable to drive circulation and win advertisers. Three examples provide illustration. In the 1980s, the largest selling Hindi daily was the boisterous *Punjab Kesari*, based in Jalandhar in Punjab with a second edition from New Delhi.²⁹ Colourful and careless, it was given credit for influencing other Hindi dailies. “I see more newspapers taking to the *Punjab Kesari* line,” a dismayed editor of the old school said in 1993, “because over the years a semi-literate class of readership has emerged with the spread of literacy Their mix is sex and religion and it sells.”³⁰ The formula is still potent, but *Punjab Kesari* is no longer among the biggest players. Internal problems appear to have prevented its management from keeping pace with the competition from *Dainik Jagran*, *Dainik Bhaskar* and others. *Aj*, the oldest still-publishing Hindi daily founded in 1920 to foster the national movement, has experienced a similar decline. In 2008, *Aj* and *Punjab Kesari* could each claim about 800,000 sales a day, substantial by international standards, but no more than they had achieved in the 1990s.³¹ If evidence from elsewhere is a guide, only the top two newspapers are likely to make profits and survive in a mass-media environment. Such trends begin to show themselves in other languages as well.

Kannada

Circulations grew strikingly in every language, and each story reveals aspects of distinctive cultures as capitalism presses against them in its spread into rural India. Kannada and Oriya stand out in Figure 9.5.

²⁸ Ninan, *Headlines*, p. 88.

²⁹ Robin Jeffrey, “Hindi: ‘Taking to the *Punjab Kesari* Line’”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. xxxii, no. 3, 18 January 1997, pp. 78-9.

³⁰ Interview, Prabhask Joshi, Editor, *Jansatta*, New Delhi, 20 February 1993.

³¹ ABC July-December 2008. Both *Aj* and *Punjab Kesari* have incomplete certificates from the ABC for the period. This indicates that circulation figures have not been verified to ABC standards.

Average daily circulation increases by language and percentage, 1995-9/2000-4

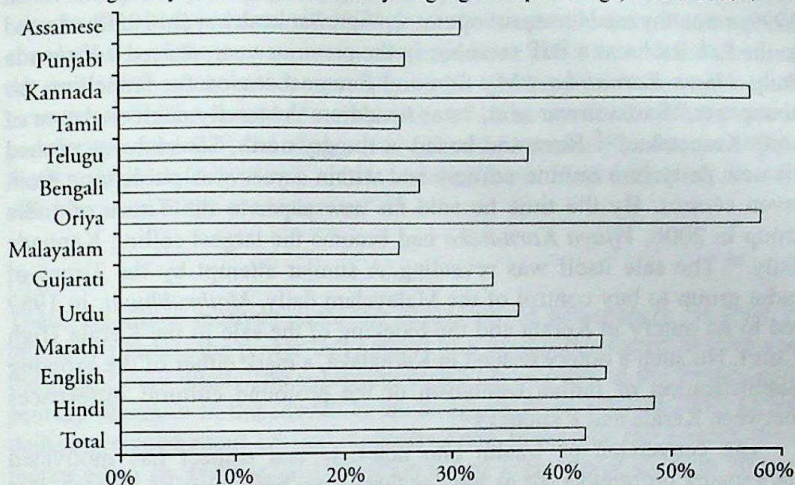


Figure 9.5.

DAILY CIRCULATION, PERCENTAGE INCREASES, BY LANGUAGE,
1995-9 AVERAGE TO 2000-4 AVERAGE

Note: The graph is based on the average circulation for the two five-year periods. Figures are those of the Registrar of Newspapers for India.

Kannada, the language of the state of Karnataka, appeared to be a language-in-waiting in the 1990s when it had four newspapers as members of the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) and average sales of about 800,000 copies a day.³² By 2008, Kannada had eight dailies as members of the ABC with audited circulations of 1.6 million newspapers a day.³³ Circulations had grown by more than 50 per cent in less than ten years. If one were proposing “stages” in the development of capitalist newspaper industries, Kannada had entered the stage of intense competition among a number of publications. Readers of Kannada were entering a “mass-media” age with more than thirty-five copies of a Kannada daily newspaper circulating each day for every 1,000 people in the state of Karnataka.³⁴

³² Robin Jeffrey, “Kannada: ‘We Fake it There is Competition’”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. xxxii, no. 12, 22 March 1997, pp. 566-70.

³³ ABC July-December 2008. In 2005, the RNI figures for Kannada were just under 2 million copies a day.

³⁴ Such calculations are crude. Not all residents of Karnataka read Kannada; the city of Bangalore is cosmopolitan and notably English-language oriented. The dominance of Bangalore retarded the expansion of Kannada newspapers. A notable change came in 1998 when Kannada dailies exceeded one million copies a day for the first time. Jeffrey, “Testing”, p. 467.

The change followed a classic pattern for newspapers and capitalism. In 1999, a wealthy road transport operator, Vijay Sankeshwar (b. 1950), elected to the Lok Sabha as a BJP member in the previous year, started a Kannada daily, *Vijaya Karnataka*. "My first and foremost reason for launching the newspaper," Sankeshwar said, "was to address the totally neglected area of north Karnataka."³⁵ Born and based in the dry north, Sankeshwar pushed his new daily into remote corners and within a year was publishing from seven centres. By the time he sold his newspaper to the Times of India group in 2006, *Vijaya Karnataka* had become the largest selling Kannada daily.³⁶ The sale itself was revealing. A similar attempt by the Times of India group to buy control of the Malayalam daily, *Mathrubhumi*, in 1989 led to an outcry in Kerala and the blocking of the sale in the Kerala High Court. No such a outcry ensued in Karnataka, a mark either of the growing sophistication of Indian capitalism or the profound cultural differences between Kerala and Karnataka.³⁷

The conversion of wealth into notoriety and respect has motivated newspaper proprietors for as long as there have been printing presses. But successful business people also sense when the timing is right. From his vantage point in transport, Sankeshwar knew that he could carry a newspaper into areas of Karnataka where newspapers were relatively rare, that there would be a market for them and that advertisers would welcome the chance to promote their products in such pristine territory. A newspaper also fitted in with political ambition and with models from neighbouring Andhra Pradesh.³⁸ When Sankeshwar floated his own short-lived political party in 2003, he no doubt had in mind the successful Telugu Desam Party, founded in the 1980s by the film star N. T. Rama Rao with the aid of the Eenadu newspaper group (see this book, p. 133).³⁹

Political competition helped propel the growth of Kannada dailies. From the mid-1990s, Karnataka produced three-way contests for control of the state government, fought out between the Congress, the BJP and the Janata Dal (Secular). The state had six Chief Ministers between 1996 and 2008, and the results of the 2009 general elections, though heavily favouring the BJP,

³⁵ *USP Age*, December 2004, p. 65.

³⁶ Biographical Sketch of Members of 13th Lok Sabha, <http://parliamentofindia.nic.in/13/lok13/biodata/13KN24.htm>. *Communalism Combat*, September 2006, <http://www.sabrang.com/cc/archive/2006/sep06/cover3.html>. *The Hindu*, 18 September 2005, <http://thehindu.com/2005/09/18/stories/2005091803890500.htm> (downloaded 18 June 2009).

³⁷ Robin Jeffrey, "Malayalam: 'The Day-to-Day Social Life of the People ...'", *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. xxxii, nos 1-2, 4-11 January 1997, p. 19.

³⁸ The scripts for Kannada and Telugu are quite closely related. See the map on p. 28.

³⁹ Rediff.com, 28 May 2003, <http://www.rediff.com/news/2003/may/28bjp.htm> (downloaded 18 June 2009).

showed all three parties with significant shares of the vote.⁴⁰ We know from other regions that political rivalry and involvement help increase newspaper circulation, and the pervasiveness of competitive politics in Karnataka from the mid-1990s contributed, especially in the countryside, to an eagerness to have “news”. The spread of newspapers was also credited with the rise in popularity of the BJP and of aggressive Hindu-chauvinist tendencies. *Vijaya Karnataka* and *Udayavani*, a critic wrote, “have been indulging in such saffronisation of the reader’s mind”.⁴¹

Oriya

There are other motivators for the expansion of newspapers, at least in the early phases: the power that control of a newspaper seems to give and the fear it may elicit. The expansion of the Oriya press in the twenty-first century seems to fit this model. In the five years from 1997 to 2001, Oriya dailies averaged about 1.9 million copies a day. In the next three years, they increased to an average of 2.8 million a day, a growth of close to 50 per cent. Moreover, since the early 1990s, circulations trebled – from fewer than 800,000 copies a day to about 2.5 million. By 2008, nine Oriya dailies were members of the ABC, a mark of a competition in which no one had yet emerged dominant – and no one had gone broke.

Oriya newspapers in 2009 existed in a classic “proprietors’ golden age” atmosphere, which Eliza Parija described in *The Hoot*.⁴² In the 2009 parliamentary and Orissa elections, the editor of the largest-circulating Oriya daily, *Sambad*, lost as a Congress candidate for an assembly seat, but the editors of *Dharitri* (No. 2) and *Prajatantra* (No. 9, but with a proud history) both retained their seats in parliament as members of the locally powerful Biju Janata Dal (BJD). The managing editor of *Samaya* (No. 5) lost as a Congress candidate for parliament. “The newspapers sported screaming headlines accusing rival parties,” Parija wrote. When it was over, *Dharitri* “devoted sizeable space to its editor’s victory and his party’s clean sweep”, and, not surprisingly, *Sambad* “downplayed its editor’s defeat and that of his party in the State”. What’s the use of a newspaper if its owners can’t have fun?

The question is only partly facetious. There are two prominent ways in which newspaper circulations grow. They are not mutually exclusive; one

⁴⁰ The BJP won 42 per cent of the vote and 18 of the 25 seats in the state; the Congress took 38 per cent of the vote and 4 seats; and the Janata Dal (S) 14 per cent of the vote and 3 seats.

⁴¹ *Communalism Combat*, September 2006, <http://www.sabrang.com/cc/archive/2006/sep06/cover3.html>.

⁴² Eliza Parija, “Orissa’s editor-MPs”, *The Hoot*, 22 May 2009, <http://www.thehoot.org/web/home/printstory.php?sid=3856> (downloaded 15 June 2009). Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), p. 111.

may complement the other. The first is provoked by political competition where the struggles are fierce and control of a newspaper is seen as essential to spread one's name and story among potential supporters. To achieve such ends, ambitious (or idealistic) families are prepared to accept financial loss. This is part of the story in Oriya. But only part. The other clear path to circulation growth is relentless modern marketing of the kind which *Vijaya Karnataka* introduced in Kannada and with which the *Dainik Bhaskar* chain stormed into Gujarat with *Divya Bhaskar*.

Gujarati

In Gujarat, the variation lay in the fact that the mould-breaking new newspaper came from a chain based outside of Gujarat. *Divya Bhaskar* was the creation of the burgeoning Dainik Bhaskar group, which originated as a Hindi daily in Bhopal. It began its push to become one of the country's leading newspapers only in 1997 when it launched a Hindi daily in Jaipur to take on *Rajasthan Patrika* (this book, pp. xii, 98). In June 2003, widely believed to be with the encouragement of a Gujarat government keen to break the hold of Gujarat's two dominant dailies, *Gujarat Samachar* and *Sandesh*, *Divya Bhaskar* began publishing in Gujarati in Ahmedabad. This might have seemed a risky business; the Times of India group had failed with a Gujarati daily in the 1990s (this book, p. 211), and the Gujarati newspaper industry has a reputation for being rough and unscrupulous. The Dainik Bhaskar group, however, brought slick management, deep pockets and its experience of the Jaipur start-up.⁴³ Within a few months *Divya Bhaskar* was a multi-edition Gujarati daily, and by 2008 it published from five centres and had an audited circulation of 900,000. Significantly, by 2008 both *Gujarat Samachar* and *Sandesh* had withdrawn from the ABC after clashes over the authenticity of their circulation claims. The Dainik Bhaskar group, on the other hand, had become a fascination for students of management who produced case studies of its promotional and pricing strategies.⁴⁴ The arrival of *Divya Bhaskar* drove up Gujarati circulations, which averaged 3.1 million copies in the five years 1998-2003. In the next two years, once *Divya Bhaskar* was launched, they shot up to 4.7 million copies, an increase of 50 per cent, and averaged 5.3 million copies a day in 2006 and 2007.⁴⁵

The *Divya Bhaskar* story illustrated one pathway to newspaper expansion: the drive of capitalist management, once a market opportunity was perceived. That opportunity may well have included encouragement from a government

⁴³ *Mid-day*, 19 September 2003, <http://www.mid-day.com/news/2003/sep/64254.htm> (downloaded 21 June 2009).

⁴⁴ "The Price War in Gujarat Newspaper Industry", Caselet CLCB039, Indian Centre for Management Research, 2005, <http://www.icmrindia.org> (downloaded 21 June 2009).

⁴⁵ RNI figures for the relevant years.

eager to break the hold of unfriendly existing dailies. "For almost a year we studied the market," one of the Dainik Bhaskar family said. "Gujarat is one market, which still has huge untapped potential."⁴⁶

Assamese

Assamese, on the other hand, illustrates the other motivation: political competition and the hunger for a voice. By 2006, Assam recorded twenty-three daily newspapers, eleven of them claiming circulations of more than 25,000.⁴⁷ Circulation in the first decade of the twenty-first century was claimed to have passed 440,000 a day, and penetration exceeded thirty dailies per thousand speakers of Assamese.⁴⁸

The life-or-death quality of politics in Assam and the north-east helps explain such increases. People with causes to champion were prepared to put up money to have a voice in print, while potential readers had reason for curiosity – both as spectator-voyeurs and as citizens who realized that knowledge of political activity could keep one out of trouble. By 2008, five Assamese dailies were members of the ABC, and though their total circulation was less than 450,000 copies a day, membership of the ABC indicated that advertising and commercial revenues were at least as important as ideology and notoriety.

Assamese newspapers dramatize the intersection of the ideological and the commercial. Assamese journalists are among the most vulnerable in India, caught in the armed insurgencies of north-eastern India. Between November 2008 and March 2009, two journalists were murdered, apparently for having offended one or another of the interests involved in the complex struggles played out in India's borderlands.⁴⁹ At the same time, commercial considerations press hard too. "We are simply bothered about our TRPs [Television Rating Points]," the head of an Assamese television news channel told Sevanti Ninan. Another mark of the growth of consumption-led

⁴⁶ Sudhir Agarwal, quoted in *Mid-Day*, 19 September 2003, <http://www.mid-day.com/news/2003/sep/64254.htm> (downloaded 21 June 2009).

⁴⁷ *Press in India, 2005-06* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, n.d. [2009]), pp. 253, 259, 275-6.

⁴⁸ Based on a calculation of 14.3 million Assamese speakers in 2006 and daily circulation of 448,000. By 2007 the RNI figures for Assamese claimed more than 600,000 copies. See Table 9.1 in this Epilogue.

⁴⁹ *Assam Tribune*, 23 November 2008, <http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/details.asp?id=nov2308/at01> (downloaded 22 June 2009) for the murder of Jagajit Saikia, correspondent of *Amar Asom* for Kokrajhar district in the north-west of the state. *IFJ Asia-Pacific*, 25 March 2009, <http://asiapacific.ifj.org/en/articles/ifj-condemns-murder-of-newspaper-editor-in-assam-india> (downloaded 22 June 2009) for the murder of Anil Mozumdar, owner and executive editor of *Aaji* on 24 March 2009. See Ninan's account of journalists' risks in the north-east in *Outlook*, 8 June 2009, p. 80.

competition lay in the fact that Television Audience Measurement (TAM) had begun operations in Assam in November 2008.⁵⁰

Ownership and its predicaments

Among the contributions of Ninan's pioneering work, both in the media monitor *The Hoot* and in *Headlines from the Heartland*, is her focus on the changes in the financial base of newspapers. In the twenty-first century, Indian newspapers edged down the path that US and UK newspapers have walked since the 1960s: listing on the stock exchange. When the last edition of this book was published in 2003, Midday Multimedia of Mumbai (see this book, pp. xix-xx) and *Sandesh* of Ahmedabad were the only significant print-media companies listed on the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE). By the time Ninan completed her book three years later, five print media companies were listed.⁵¹ In mid-2009, the Web allowed easy scrutiny of companies listed on the BSE. The following primarily print-media companies were listed:

Deccan Chronicle Holdings Ltd (Hyderabad) Code 532608
Jagran Prakashan Ltd (Kanpur) Code 532705
HT Media Ltd (New Delhi) Code 532662
Mid-day Multimedia Ltd (Mumbai) Code 532416
Sandesh Ltd (Ahmedabad) Code 526725

About twenty other media companies were listed, all of them primarily in electronic media.⁵²

The story of Knight-Ridder, once the largest newspaper chain in the US, is a cautionary one for Indian print media. Two family companies, Knight Newspapers and Ridder Publications, each chose to list on the US stock exchanges in 1969; they merged in 1974. By 2005, Knight-Ridder was in financial difficulties, driven, many would argue, by the demand of shareholders for high returns on their investments. In 2006, the company was forced to sell to another US media group, the McClatchy Company.⁵³ Ninan recognized such possibilities for Indian media when she focused on the global economic crisis at the end of 2008. A year previously, she wrote,

⁵⁰ *The Hindu*, 21 June 2009, <http://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/mag/2009/06/21/stories/2009062150100300.htm> (downloaded 21 June 2009).

⁵¹ Ninan, *Headlines*, pp. 266-7. I cannot find Living Media listed on the BSE in June 2009.

⁵² Cyber Media India Ltd (532640), Zee News Ltd (532794), Zee Entertainment Ltd (505537), Sun TV Network Ltd (532733), New Delhi Television Ltd (532569), TV Today Network Ltd (532515), Television Eighteen India Ltd (532299). Mehta, *India on Television*, pp. 98-9 adds another dozen electronic-media companies.

⁵³ *New York Times*, 12 March 2006.

"everybody was writing frenzied stories about media stocks being the flavour of the month". By October 2008, the share price of listed media companies, such as HT Media, Jagran Prakashan and Deccan Chronicle, had fallen by as much as 80 per cent.⁵⁴

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Indian-language newspapers have remained overwhelmingly family-owned. This of course means the prejudices and ambitions of individuals find outlet in their newspapers. But on past evidence, family owners are usually content with modest annual returns of perhaps 10 per cent on investment and to consider the power and status that newspaper ownership brings sufficient additional benefit. Once floated as public companies, however, media enterprises must satisfy the expectations of shareholders. Bagdikian quotes a US television executive: "This is a business where if you are a bird-brain you have a thirty-five percent margin. Many good broadcasters have a forty-to-sixty percent margin."⁵⁵ In its prospectus, prior to launching on the stock exchange, Jagran Prakashan reported a before-tax profit of Rs 200 million (US \$4 million) for the year 2004-5.⁵⁶

Jagran's 2005 prospectus provides an insight into the finances and ambitions of a family company seeking to translate itself into an all-India media power. The Jagran family set up its own private company for television in 2004, and in 2009 it controlled IBN7, one of the more successful of India's fifty news channels.⁵⁷ However, the share price of Jagran Prakashan in July 2009 was about Rs 89, having fallen as low as Rs 40 in November 2008 from a high of Rs 169.⁵⁸ Newspapers have always needed advertisers and have adapted to their pressures. But the combination of stockholders, hungry for ever-larger annual returns on their investment, and advertisers seeking ever-growing readerships creates a difficult and potentially deleterious equation, as the North American experience shows.

"The established print media barons," Mehta writes in *India on Television*, "were initially slow to react" to the opportunities that satellite television opened up in the 1990s.⁵⁹ New entrepreneurs, more familiar with the technology and its prospects, were the first to start channels, overcome remarkable difficulties and

⁵⁴ *The Hindu*, 26 October 2008, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/thscrip/print.pl?file=2008102650080300.htm&date> (downloaded 26 October 2008).

⁵⁵ Ben H. Bagdikian, *The New Media Monopoly* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), p. 8.

⁵⁶ Dainik Prakashan Ltd, Red Herring Prospectus, 10 January 2006, p. 11, downloaded from BSE website, 14 June 2009.

⁵⁷ "Jagran TV Private Limited", 20 July 2009, <http://investing.businessweek.com/research/stocks/private/snapshot.asp?privcapId=28705> (downloaded 20 July 2009).

⁵⁸ Bombay Stock Exchange, 27 July 2009, <http://www.bseindia.com/stockreach.htm?scripcd=532705> (downloaded 27 July 2009) and Ninan in *The Hindu*, 26 October 2008.

⁵⁹ Mehta, *India on Television*, p.68.

float companies on the stock exchange to raise capital.⁶⁰ Television challenged print families in a number of ways, as Mehta points out. At one level, the unfamiliar technology required heavy new investment. To go into television was a double gamble. First, could the technology be made to work and would it find profitable markets? And second, would capital raised on the stock exchange lead families to lose control of their businesses? The answer to the first question became increasingly apparent. Television was profitable: its share of total advertising expenditure rose from 24 per cent to 36 per cent between 1994 and 1999; print's share fell from 65 per cent to 55 per cent. By 2005, the division had stabilized with print and television splitting about 90 per cent of major advertising spending between them.⁶¹ About half of print advertising went to Indian-language print; the rest, to English.⁶² By 2009, a number of the biggest print companies were also running television channels – the Hindustan Times, India Today, the Times of India, Jagran, Bhaskar, Malayala Manorama, Sandesh, Gujarat Samachar and Eenadu perhaps the most prominent.

It is too soon to tell how print-media businesses founded by families will adapt to the possibilities of joint-stock companies. Even before the world recession of 2008, the tendency to float on the stock exchange was limited. The will and ability to raise capital yet retain family control of large enterprises may be another distinctively Indian contribution to our understanding of what it is to be modern. There is little discussion of the stock exchange, for example, in Harish Damodaran's *India's New Capitalists* where the subtitle highlights the focus: *Caste, Business and Industry in a Modern Nation*. Damodaran sees caste and caste experience as the building blocks of Indian capitalism with south India having a wider range of castes able to follow the caste-and-capitalism road.⁶³ The two largest newspaper owners of the Nehru era – the old merchant-Marwaris, Ramakrishna Dalmia and Ramnath Goenka – exercised close personal control, in accordance with the practices in which they had been schooled.⁶⁴ Those family-initiated businesses that have gone public have, Murdoch-like, found ways to retain control in family hands.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Mehta, *India on Television*, pp. 97-9. The institutional story of mobile phones in India is similar. Rahul Mukherji, "Interests, Wireless Technology and Institutional Change", *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 68, no. 2 (May 2009), pp. 491-517.

⁶¹ Mehta, *India on Television*, p. 157.

⁶² Ninan, *Headlines*, p. 263. Neyazi, *Media Convergence and Hindi Newspapers*, p. 260, quoted an Ad Ex India 2007 survey.

⁶³ Harish Damodaran, *India's New Capitalists: Caste, Business and Industry in a Modern Nation* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2008), p. 312.

⁶⁴ B. G. Verghese, *Warrior of the Fourth Estate: Ramnath Goenka of the Express* (New Delhi: Viking, 2005), pp. 192-3 and Neelima Dalmia Adhar, *Father Dearest: The Life and Times of R. K. Dalmia* (New Delhi: Roli, 2003), pp. 138-41.

⁶⁵ Damodaran, *India's New Capitalists*, p. 116, cites Dr Reddy's Laboratories and Apollo Hospitals of Pratap C. Reddy as examples of successful enterprises in south India. Both were

Advertising and its pressures

To be modern is to measure. The French Revolution, a landmark of “modernity”, propagated the metric system. The British in India agonized to produce population censuses and land surveys. People spending vast sums of money in the media industry thirst for ways of measuring the effectiveness of their expenditure. Newspapers and television depend on advertising, and to show the precise benefits for advertisers of particular outlets and formats is a treasured goal of both those who sell ads and those who buy them. The formation of the ABC in 1948 was a first step in India to provide reliable measurements that newspaper owners could present to advertising clients. The ABC offered a relatively reliable indication of how many copies of a newspaper were sold. But how many people – and what sorts of people – actually read a newspaper? The first National Readership Survey in 1970 attempted to answer such questions (this book, pp. 64-5, 107, 213-15).

The people who sell advertising (for example, newspapers) and the people who buy advertising (for example, soap companies) are complementary opponents. One cannot do without the other, but they have different interests. Since 1994, two rival surveys have attempted to measure the reach of print media. The National Readership Survey (NRS) has been sponsored by the Indian Newspaper Society (INS), the ABC and advertising agencies represented by the Advertising Agencies Association of India (AAAI) founded in 1945. The NRS, however, went into abeyance after its 2006 survey “because of suspected anomalies in readership findings”.⁶⁶ The 2006 survey, which claimed a sample size of 280,000, presented results that showed growth in daily newspaper readership to 222 million people, 45 per cent of the urban population and 19 per cent of the rural. Absolute numbers were roughly equal – 110 million rural readers and 112 million urban. The results were satisfactory for daily newspapers: they could claim continued growth in readership, though magazine readership fell. Print could also claim great potential since “359 million people who can read ... do not read any publication” and 20 million of them were in the A and B categories of wealth.⁶⁷ Some organizations, however, did not like the results, and Bennett, Coleman and Co. Ltd (BCCL), the publishers of *The Times of India*, withdrew

listed on the Bombay Stock Exchange in 2009 with the family retaining roughly one-third of the shares. Scrip Codes 500124 and 508869, <http://www.bseindia.com/> (downloaded 5 August 2009).

⁶⁶ Anushree Chandran in *Livemint*, 23 January 2009, <http://www.livemint.com/Articles/PrintArticle.aspx?artid=82337EB4-E8A4-11DD-BB-42> (downloaded 6 July 2009).

⁶⁷ National Readership Council, Press Release, “NRS 2006 – Key Findings”, 29 August 2006.

its financial contribution of Rs 2.5 crore (US \$500,000).⁶⁸ No NRS had been conducted between 2006 and 2009.

The rival Media Research Users' Council (MRUC) conducted Indian Readership Surveys (IRS) from 1994. Made up of companies that are big buyers of advertising, the MRUC grew out of a belief that surveys sponsored by the print media could be self-serving and inaccurate. NRS surveys usually showed growth. In contrast, the first IRS of 2009 showed a decline in overall *readership*, even though most publications were claiming that their *circulations* continued to rise.⁶⁹ A decline in readership should mean that advertising rates do not increase – or even that they should fall. Data leading to such conclusions are not welcome to the people who sell advertising space – the print media.

The collision of interests had produced the two rival surveys. Predictably, disagreements have arisen over the value of each, and organizations carefully choose data from the most flattering source to show that they are strong and effective. In 2007, the MRUC inducted six newspaper members into its organization to try to create a single survey which would save money and be acceptable to all interests – the people who sell ads (newspapers), the people who make ads (agencies) and the people who buy ads (businesses).⁷⁰ By mid-2009, as the world economic recession made frugality a virtue, agreement on a single survey seemed more likely, though by no means certain.⁷¹

Television had created a single Television Audience Measurement (TAM) system in 2000, and this remained relatively unchallenged. It used meters installed in television sets which recorded the use of the set. The data were tabulated weekly to generate programme ratings – TRPs (Television Rating Points). In 2009, the TAM system asserted that it had meters placed on 30,000 television sets, spread across the 640 towns and cities with populations greater than 100,000. No meters were installed in rural India.⁷² India in 2009 had about 120 million television households. The calculations by which results from 30,000 meters are extrapolated to represent 120 million television

⁶⁸ Anushree Chandran in *Livemint*, 21 May 2009, <http://www.livemint.com/Articles/PrintArticle.aspx?artid=FB277587-461A-11DE-9500-00> (downloaded 6 July 2009).

⁶⁹ "IRS 2009 R1: Hindustan Times tops in Delhi; TOI tops in Mumbai", [8 May 2009], http://www.exchange4media.com/e4m/news/printpage.asp?section_id=40&news_id=347 (downloaded 12 May 2009).

⁷⁰ Anushree Chandran in *Livemint*, 15 May 2008, <http://www.livemint.com/2008/05/15230919/A-fresh-pitch-for-a-single-pri.html> (downloaded 30 July 2009).

⁷¹ Anushree Chandran in *Livemint*, 21 July 2009, <http://www.livemint.com/Articles/PrintArticle.aspx?artid=62BFB5BE-7609-11DE-BC9A-000B5DABF636> (downloaded 30 July 2009).

⁷² http://www.tamindia.com/tamindia/Company_Profile.htm (downloaded 27 August 2009). Mehta, *India on Television*, pp. 178-84.

sets require faith and alchemy, but “in the absence of any other objective measure”, Mehta writes, advertisers put their money where the TRPs are.⁷³

Advertising is essential to consumer capitalism and the media it supports. This environment requires media organizations to capture readers and viewers and display them to potential advertisers. Out of these needs arise audit bureaus, readership surveys and audience measurements. The need to attract readers and viewers is one of the top-down pressures that affect newspapers and the people who work for them. These pressures may encourage sensation, fluff and trivia – the “dumbing down” that is often deplored (this book, pp. 102-4). At the other end of the scale, at the level of the small town, advertising can affect newspapers and journalists differently. Neyazi found at the *Dainik Bhaskar* office in Itarsi in Madhya Pradesh that

Advertisements ... [were] largely collected by local reporters or stringers This is because it would be expensive to appoint separate advertising sale personnel for small towns and rural areas where business activities are not developed. Those stringers get a fifteen per cent commission for bringing in advertising. Thus, stringers in small towns can earn a little extra money by collecting advertisements.⁷⁴

To be both a reporter and a seller of advertisements raises ethical problems that will often be solved by accepting the advertisements and overlooking potentially troublesome stories. As Indian-language newspapers move ever deeper into small-town India, more people encounter such dilemmas. Neyazi reports that the bureau of *Dainik Bhaskar* in Itarsi (population 100,000) achieved its substantial 2007 advertising target “with a handsome surplus”.⁷⁵ A journalist can make money or trouble or both. At the level of the management of newspapers, the tone and focus of a paper can be tailored to try to win readers. At the level of the small-town journalist, offended or favour-seeking local identities can bribe and threaten.

“Standards” and their “erosion”

“The media in India is no longer a healthy and reliable guide to the true significance of things,” writes Tarun Tejpal, editor of *Tehelka* and author of the brutal novel, *The Story of My Assassins*, in which the protagonist is a journalist. “In the last fifteen years, while the media has burgeoned

⁷³ Mehta, *India on Television*, p. 183. A rival television viewing monitor called a Map is less widely used. See <http://www.audiencemap.com/> (downloaded 27 August 2009).

⁷⁴ Neyazi, “Media Convergence and Hindi Newspapers”, p. 261. The target was reported to be well in excess of US \$100,000.

⁷⁵ Neyazi, “Media Convergence and Hindi Newspapers”, p. 266.

dramatically, its range and depth of coverage may actually have narrowed.”⁷⁶

Tejpal’s criticism focuses on the way trivia and promotions force out difficult, controversial stories as media become *mass* media, driven by consumer capitalism. Television provides memorable examples. Nalin Mehta points to 26 May 2005 as a landmark: the day NDTV let two movie stars present the 8 pm news in the guise of the characters of their new film due to open the next day – “the news with Bunty and Babli.”⁷⁷ The hunger for novelty, sensation and “breaking news” leads twenty-four-hour news channels to strain for items. On a slow day, “Police Commissioner’s dog found” could rate full-screen coverage on a leading Hindi channel.⁷⁸ Examples of the ridiculous and deplorable are easy to find – as they are in liberal-capitalist mass media anywhere. Freedom does not guarantee good taste or good judgement.

The pressures of consumer capitalism are at one end of a spectrum of influences. You don’t offend big advertisers; indeed, if the price is right, a media outfit may do its best to help them. At the other end of the spectrum are threats to the lives of journalists who run foul of the people about whom they report. Indian journalists get murdered. “Armed criminals on Tuesday shot dead *Hindustan* correspondent Vikas Ranjan,” the *Hindustan Times*, the English-language stablemate of *Hindustan*, reported in a seven-paragraph story on 25 November 2008. “Ranjan, who wrote extensively on crime and corruption, had been receiving threats for some time.”⁷⁹ Outrage over Ranjan’s murder was overwhelmed within a day, however, by the terrorist attack on Mumbai on 26 November 2008. The more remote the area the more vulnerable the journalist. In the north-east, threats, murders and coercion are common. An inquiry sent by the Press Council of India to the north-east in 2007 concluded that “the Press and the media ... were functioning in an atmosphere of fear”.⁸⁰ The killing of Anil Mazumdar in March 2009 brought the average murder rate of journalists in Assam since 1987 to one a year.⁸¹ To have any meaningful protection, “the vernacular journalist in India”, a senior editor wrote, “must be metro-based and have friends in the

⁷⁶ Tarun J. Tejpal, “Pink Chaddis and Toothless Days”, *Seminar*, no. 596 (April 2009), p. 19. *The Story of My Assassins* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2009).

⁷⁷ Mehta, *India on Television*, p. 142.

⁷⁸ The policeman’s dog appeared on Star News. Umesh Upadhyay, television producer, Rockland, showed the clip at a media seminar, Chandigarh, 19 March 2009.

⁷⁹ *Hindustan Times*, 25 November 2008, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/StoryPage/Print.aspx?Id=762e9929-9cb4-41e9-9333-50a> (downloaded 13 May 2009).

⁸⁰ *Press Council of India. Annual Report (April 1, 2007 - March 31, 2008)* (New Delhi: Press Council of India, 2008), p. 107

⁸¹ *The Indian Express*, 26 March 2009, <http://www.indianexpress.com/story-print/439096> (downloaded 27 July 2009).

English media circles, so his death is highlighted in the 'national' media for a long time ... and also finds its way into the WWW and international media organizations' conscience".⁸²

Such vulnerability may lead to practices that are closer to the seamy, rather than the heroic, side of journalism. "I earn around Rs 5,000 every month by not writing," a reporter with a Hindi daily in Chhattisgarh told Shubhranshu Choudhary. "Journalism here is the art of *not* writing." Because tribal Chhattisgarh is so dangerous, with deadly contests going on between government-sponsored militias and insurgent Naxalites or Maoists, it is safer to file positive stories in exchange for payment. "We get a fee for not writing about the corruption. That is our salary." The consequences of filing stories that reflect poorly on the government and local power holders include losing your column in local newspapers, having your brother imprisoned on charges of insurgency, having your house bulldozed for a military volleyball court and being told you are going to be killed by the police. "The pressures on journalists in Chhattisgarh," asserts Choudhary, "are special."⁸³

The Press Council of India's *Compendium of Adjudications* deals with frequent claims about the bribery of reporters.⁸⁴ During his fieldwork with *Dainik Bhaskar* in Madhya Pradesh, Neyazi "repeatedly confronted the question of corruption prevalent among journalists". One of his informants told him:

Most of the journalists indulge in making money by hiding real problems from the people. They publish only those stories which are non-controversial and not going to adversely affect the local administration and powerful people in the town. If there are some honest journalists who are bold enough to highlight the issues of corruption going on at a higher level or who write something against the local criminals, they would be soon transferred to another place.⁸⁵

Poor salaries and insecure jobs create conditions in which it is not surprising that a reporter will pick up what he (or, more rarely, she) can.

Many journalists, however, work hard and take risks to get troublesome stories into print. In his research, Neyazi follows the case of a district reporter summoned to Bhopal for what the reporter describes as "a kind of 'court martial'" after complaints are made that he has been taking bribes. The resident editor of *Dainik Bhaskar* tells Neyazi that he is "trying to cleanse *Dainik Bhaskar* of all blackmailers". After the reporter presents the evidence

⁸² Email to R. Jeffrey, 28 July 2009.

⁸³ *The South Asian*, 31 March 2009, http://www.thesouthasian.org/archives/2009/the_art_of_not_writing_1.html (downloaded 28 April 2009).

⁸⁴ *Compendium of Adjudications* (April 1, 2007-March 31, 2008) (New Delhi: Press Council of India, 2008), Case No. 45, pp. 176-9, No. 46, pp. 179-82, No. 67, pp. 235-8.

⁸⁵ Neyazi, "Media Convergence and Hindi Newspapers," p. 224.

for his reports, head office backs him and his stories.⁸⁶ Such tensions are long standing in newspaper offices wherever a free press exists.

Are the ethical and professional standards of Indian media better or worse than they were ten or twenty years ago? One would be ill-advised to romanticize the professionalism or ethics of the media of the late 1980s or 1990s. Reporting at the time of the Mandal Report demonstrations or the Ayodhya campaign of the early 1990s was notorious for its poor standards.⁸⁷ What is new is the rapid expansion of media, the voracious demand for copy and the large numbers of people who make a living, or part of a living, from working for newspapers. Small incidents are constantly recorded and disseminated as "news". Nowhere in the world has a rural population as large as India's been so comprehensively caught up in the combine harvester of consumer-capitalist media. This invasion of a vast still-rural and provincial world by the machinery of modern media is part of an "Indian modernity".

One can visualize an urbanizing, "modernizing", "liberalizing" India sliding into a "propaganda model" of the kind Chomsky and Herman described in the USA more than a generation ago. "Mass media ... carry out a system-supportive propaganda function by reliance on market forces, internalized assumptions and self-censorship, and without significant overt coercion."⁸⁸ Tejpal sees evidence all around: "politics, business and media all dangerously in cahoots" to produce "uncritical puff jobs", delivered by "the naïve and the young, whose primary talent is to hold a mike steady in someone's face".⁸⁹ Training is part of the requirement. Journalists need to know the research tools available to them, understand the law and to have been schooled in the ancient arts of evidence, fact-checking and the famous Five Little Questions.⁹⁰ "Almost all the young journalists joined *Dainik Bhaskar* after a degree in journalism," Neyazi reports of his research in 2006 and 2008.⁹¹ But the bigger challenges to ethics and ideals come from temptation, intimidation and the pressures of advertising and, in some cases, share prices. Those pressures are common to journalists all over the world. India's relatively fragmented ownership leaves room for the possibility that there usually will be renegade proprietors and journalists who will find and publicize controversial stories.⁹²

⁸⁶ Neyazi, "Media Convergence and Hindi Newspapers", pp. 232-3.

⁸⁷ This book, pp. 139-40 and Robin Jeffrey, "[Not] Being There: Dalits and India's Newspapers", *South Asia*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2001), p. 234.

⁸⁸ Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), p. 306.

⁸⁹ Tejpal, "Pink Chaddis", p. 21.

⁹⁰ Who, what, when, where and why.

⁹¹ Neyazi, "Media Convergence and Hindi Newspapers", p. 205.

⁹² Tejpal refers to "the hope that competing bigotries will cancel themselves out; that there will always be some vested interest committed to blowing the whistle on someone". "Pink Chaddis", p. 21.

And the potential of the Web creates new possibilities for individual bloggers to break news and acquire audiences. Indian media are far more diverse and difficult to dominate than in the days of Mrs Gandhi's "emergency" (this book, pp. 189-91).

Public spheres and their creation?

Does the spread of Indian-language newspapers cripple or create public spheres? The question is at the core of a debate that has emerged out of growing awareness of India's newspaper and media revolutions. In one sense, the question is a variation of earlier fears of old elites about vulgarity and trivia. One can ridicule such fears by saying that old elites simply believe that "the masses" are unable to understand anything but the immediately gratifying. "Readers of serious publications have dwindled," a Malayalam editor said in 1993 as he lamented that his serious weekly sold 55,000 copies while its two low-brow rivals sold 2.13 million (this book, p. 101).

A related critique argues that the localization of coverage – the hallmark of Indian-language dailies – has led to "the fragmentation of the public sphere". Indian-language dailies "have parochialised the reader" by covering national issues only in the most casual, unthinking way. This process has trivialized public discussion and distracted people from the serious concerns of the nation – "the grim implications," for example, "of ... the nexus between politicians and criminals, communal propaganda of the Sangh institutions and the nuclearisation of India and Pakistan."⁹³

Sevanti Ninan encountered a similar attitude in her exploration of the Hindi press in 2002. "Social activists," she wrote, "talked of how excessive localisation worked against the mobilising of a mass movement." They argued that district-level inserts, of the kind *Eenadu* had developed so successfully from 1989 (this book, pp. 2-3, 68), quarantined local news. "You could not build a statewide movement," Ninan was told, "... if the news of something that happened in one part of the state did not reach the other."⁹⁴ The complaint was "that regional was being replaced by local". Important stories from localities were not reaching state capitals because they never got beyond the local pages of the localized newspapers. "Coverage of the state as a whole shrank. The intermediate picture, the amalgamation of many local universes, got squeezed out."⁹⁵

This analysis was similar to the old elite view: it looked to a better time when "the early regional papers that had statewide readership tended to

⁹³ Krishna Kumar, "Opening a Window, Just", *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. xxxvii, no. 30, 27 July 2002, pp. 3119-20. See also Robin Jeffrey, "The Public Sphere of Print Journalism", in Nalini Rajan (ed.), *Practising Journalism: Values, Constraints, Implications* (New Delhi: Sage, 2005), pp. 257-66.

⁹⁴ Ninan, *Headlines*, pp. 255-6.

⁹⁵ Ninan, *Headlines*, pp. 25 and 253-4, 258.

nurture a state identity ..., rather than pander to regional entities within a state". Thus "a circumscribed public sphere" was created and with it the danger of undermining "the 'deep horizontal comradeship' that used to bind different corners of the same state".⁹⁶ According to this view, the growth of newspaper circulations, based on extensive reporting of local events, divided and trivialized what had once been a serious, unifying public sphere.

Such an interpretation seems romantic. The spread of newspapers into distant corners has *created* "public spheres", not fragmented them. Think of an egg with the orange yolk as the constricted, old elite notion of a "public sphere". Think of the media revolution, led by Indian-language newspapers, as breaking the yolk: information flows, mixes, blends and the public sphere becomes an omelette. The vivid centre is gone and the whole is enriched. A public sphere cannot exist without media, and a liberal public sphere must be open to those who have the will and capacity to enter into discussion. In an authoritarian state, only a cowed and crippled version of "the public" can survive. A recognizable public sphere arrived in most of rural India only from the 1980s with the spread of a localized newspaper industry. There was nothing idealistic in this growth. It was not a development project driven by NGOs or well-meaning governments. Thirty years ago a newspaper might have reached a high-caste retiree or schoolteacher in rural India every week or so. It would have contained translated material from English-language newspapers in the great cities or from wire services. From the 1990s, however, many interior villages received newspapers like *Dainik Jagran*, *Eenadu* or *Sambad* every morning in time for breakfast, full of colour photos, advertisements, big headlines, racy language – and lots of, though not exclusively, local news.

Because consumer capitalism propelled expansion, newspapers had to attract readers and they did so by providing services that readers value. Among such services is a time-honoured one: the ability to stir – to annoy, trouble and influence – governments and officials. Ninan writes: "Localisation set in motion a process ... of accountability for local governance institutions that is possibly unparalleled ... in a developing country."⁹⁷ Taberez Neyazi's experience when he visited the chief municipal officer of Itarsi, a town 80 km south of Bhopal where *Dainik Bhaskar* staffs a bureau, reinforces such a view. "Issues are brought to our notice through the newspaper," the official told Neyazi,

and then we take action accordingly.... Two years ago we used to go through 100 files only in a day, but today we deal with around 400 files every day. We take action on most of the issues highlighted through different newspapers, but the probability of quick action is high if news is aired in *Dainik Bhaskar*.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Ninan, *Headlines*, pp. 296-7.

⁹⁷ Ninan, *Headlines*, p. 108.

⁹⁸ Neyazi, "Media Convergence and Hindi Newspapers", pp. 223-4.

The fact that *Dainik Bhaskar* commanded more attention than other newspapers raises another question. In studies of newspapers, there is a debate which might be characterized as "Is Big good or bad?" On one side are those who argue that only large media organizations can afford to do investigative reporting and stand up to big interests and big governments. On the other are those who contend that large organizations lose their touch and their teeth; journalistic jaguars become tame and toothless when they are fed by big advertisers and petted by governments. Those who romanticize the pre-mass- newspaper era in India would be on the side of the latter.

The "Big: good or bad?" debate has no definitive conclusion. Big media organizations are vulnerable: they need protection for their investments and they welcome government concessions; their proprietors enjoy being courted. But such description applies equally to small media organizations. Indeed, some small Indian newspapers owe their existence to their usefulness as vehicles for blackmail and receipt of government advertising dispensed as patronage (this book, p. 204). And big organizations, if their proprietors choose, can resist governments and other great institutions, as Ramnath Goenka and *The Indian Express* attempted during Mrs Gandhi's "emergency".⁹⁹ The validity of the idea that smaller, locally owned newspapers more effectively create the conditions of a public sphere depends on the ideals and budgets of owners and editors. Big papers such as *Dainik Bhaskar* or *Eenadu*, with their many editions, each heavy with local pages, bring with them a daily account of national events. Do they miss something in between? The state? The region? This is a journalist's eternal dilemma: what *really* happened out there today, boys and girls? (this book, p. 4).

Major newspapers contribute another aspect to a unique Indian modernity. As well as the unprecedented fact that they operate in eleven different scripts, the great mastheads, such as *Malayala Manorama*, *Dainik Jagran* and others, create up to two dozen local editions produced in and for the localities on which they report. Great newspapers elsewhere in the world have not taken production nearly so close to readers. One cannot imagine an edition of the *New York Times* being produced in Fargo for North Dakota readers, or of the *Globe and Mail* of Toronto published in and for Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, or of *Le Monde* being prepared in and for Narbonne or Strasbourg.¹⁰⁰ India's newspaper industry is pivotal to the making of a uniquely Indian "public sphere". In its increasingly mass-media mode, this Indian public sphere still satisfies what I would regard as key criteria: it is open; contests take place within it; and in spite of filters and gatekeepers, embarrassing events and challenging ideas find their way before audiences. These audiences

⁹⁹ Verghese, *Warrior*, pp. 137-53.

¹⁰⁰ The *Globe and Mail*, for example, produces six editions to cover all of Canada; two of them are for its core area of Toronto and the province of Ontario. [http://www.globelink.ca/downloads/gam_newspaper_edition_chart\(1\).pdf](http://www.globelink.ca/downloads/gam_newspaper_edition_chart(1).pdf) (downloaded 6 August 2009).

constitute publics far larger and more varied than could have been imagined even a generation ago.

Social diversity and its difficulties

Earlier editions of this book noted the near-absence of Dalits – “ex”-Untouchables – from the newsrooms of Indian-language newspapers (pp. 160-70). Little changed in the first decade of the twenty-first century. During his research with *Dainik Jagran* in Lucknow, Stahlberg came to know a lone Dalit journalist, a good one, about whose caste no comment was made. “The discriminatory process is subtler,” Stahlberg wrote.¹⁰¹ Ninan, whose web monitor *The Hoot*, brings together a wide range of information about Indian media, found little to contradict these conclusions. She notes a report from a correspondent that “there was not a single Dalit staff reporter in the newspapers published in [the state of] Jharkhand”.¹⁰² Neyazi’s study of *Dainik Bhaskar*, completed in 2009, concluded similarly: “There was not even single Dalit reporter in [the] entire *Dainik Bhaskar*.”¹⁰³

Other evidence confirms these impressions. In 2006, the tenth anniversary of Kenneth Cooper’s *Washington Post* story and B. N. Uniyal’s follow-up in the *Pioneer* about the absence of Dalits from newsrooms (this book, pp. 168-9), a survey of Indian media found that “Dalits and adivasis are conspicuous by their absence Not even one of the 315 key decision makers [in the survey] belonged to Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes”.¹⁰⁴

Other writers reflected on the meaning of the survey. Siddharth Varadarajan, a leading journalist with the *The Hindu*, recalled “my first brush with caste prejudice in higher education” – but he might well have said “in the media”. It was 1999, three years after Cooper and Uniyal wrote about the paucity of Dalits and of coverage of Dalit issues. Scheduled Caste students in University College of Medical Sciences in Chennai were staging protests against discrimination and abuse. They came to see Varadarajan to get publicity. He asked relevant editors to see that the paper covered the story. Nothing happened, so he covered it himself, “spent half-a-day at the college, interviewed college authorities, the students on dharna [the protest] as well as the general category [i.e. non-Dalit] students”. He wrote the story. It did not appear in the paper. It eventually appeared “in a cut and mutilated form, a full month after the Dalit students began their dharna”. Did other

¹⁰¹ Stahlberg, *Lucknow Daily*, pp. 138-9.

¹⁰² Ninan, *Headlines*, p. 223.

¹⁰³ Neyazi, “Media Convergence and Hindi Newspapers”, p. 204.

¹⁰⁴ Anil Chamaria, Jitendra Kumar, Yogendra Yadav, “Survey of the Social Profile of the Key Decision Makers in the National Media”, Media Study Group, <http://osdir.com/ml/culture.india.sarai.reader/2006-06/msg00043.html> (downloaded 17 February 2009).

media cover it? No. The story was “not considered newsworthy enough by other newspapers or by any of the news channels”.¹⁰⁵

Varadarajan’s experience was of Delhi and Tamil Nadu. Writing from Lucknow, Shivam Vij confirmed the findings of Stahlberg: Dalit journalists were almost non-existent. The reasons were, according to one of the editors Vij interviewed, that Dalits “don’t go to schools” and “can’t write a single sentence properly”. Another informant asserted similarly to Stahlberg, “Caste is always implicit. You are always aware of what is the caste of which person and what that means in caste hierarchy.”¹⁰⁶

There were, to be sure, a few Dalits in newsrooms. Eleanor Zelliott, doyenne of foreign scholars of Maharashtra, pointed out that the editor of the Nasik edition of *Sakal* had once been a Dalit.¹⁰⁷ But that was the only example of a working journalist that Zelliott could think of. Similarly, Vij concluded that there were more than two (but fewer than six) Dalit journalists in Lucknow. Such rare examples are unlikely to get Dalit stories into the newspaper, particularly when the perception is strong that Dalit and Other Backward Caste journalists are “marginalized not only in places like the Press Club but also inside the newsroom”.¹⁰⁸

Is this important? A typical response is that journalism is blind to caste, that good journalists chase good stories wherever they occur and that journalists are hired and promoted on the basis of their ability, not their caste.¹⁰⁹ But this argument is suspect. As Varadarajan’s experience showed, if a newsroom lacks wide social experience, stories are not even heard of – they do not reach newsrooms. Or if a newsroom is made aware of such stories, they are ignored or buried at the back of the paper. “Journalism that has little or no space for the majority of citizens is bound to end up missing out on the complexity of the society it seeks to cover,” Varadarajan writes.¹¹⁰

In 2009, neither the will nor the pressure exists to diversify Indian newsrooms. There is no sign that news organizations will consider – much less implement – measures to encourage greater social diversity. The American

¹⁰⁵ *The Hindu*, 3 June 2006, <http://www.thehindu.com/2006/06/03/stories/2006060301841000.htm> (downloaded 13 October 2006). It is worth pointing out that – seven years later – Varadarajan managed to get this reflection onto the opinion pages.

¹⁰⁶ Shivam Vij, “Caste Discrimination in the Newsroom”, *The Hoot*, <http://www.thehoot.org/web/home/searchdetail.php?sid=1198&bg=1> (downloaded 22 June 2008), quoting Dilip Awasthi of *Dainik Jagran*.

¹⁰⁷ Letter, Eleanor Zelliott to R. Jeffrey, 4 May 2002. The editor was Uttam Kamble.

¹⁰⁸ Vij, “Caste Discrimination”.

¹⁰⁹ Dasu Krishnamoorthy, “Casteism in Media”, *The Hoot*, 4 September 2006, mounts such arguments, <http://www.thehoot.org/web/home/searchdetail.php?sid=2255&bg=1> (downloaded 22 June 2008).

¹¹⁰ *The Hindu*, 3 June 2006, <http://www.thehindu.com/2006/06/03/stories/2006060301841000.htm> (downloaded 13 October 2006).

Society of News Editors (ASNE) made such a commitment in 1978: to achieve a “percentage of minorities in the newsrooms of the nation[’]s daily papers” that was equivalent to “the percentage of minorities in the general population” by 2005. In 1978, fewer than 4 per cent of the staff of US dailies came from minorities, though the minority population of the United States was estimated at 28 per cent of the population. Change has been slow. At the end of 2008, 13.41 per cent of staff belonged to minorities, well short of the target of 21.55 per cent (similar to what an Indian target for SCs and STs might be). Moreover, the target year had been revised to 2025.¹¹¹ Yet the commitment remained. Even in the midst of the 2009 recession, the ASNE carried out the annual census of newsroom diversity that it has undertaken for more than ten years.

In India, however, pressures on news organizations to nurture Dalit talent are few. *The Bhopal Document* of 2002, which was intended to provide a manifesto for Dalit action in the twenty-first century, highlighted the US targets and advocated similar measures in India. But the document faded after the Congress government in Madhya Pradesh, which had been its chief sponsor, lost power in 2004.¹¹² No powerful Dalit media voice has emerged in the past ten years. There are no Dalit equivalents of the *Chicago Defender*, or other African-American newspapers of the first half of the twentieth century. There are no Dalit equivalents of Robert and Nancy Maynard, African-Americans who owned a daily newspaper, the *Oakland Tribune*, in the 1990s. And there are no Dalit-oriented equivalents of *The Authentic Voice*, a project devoted to media diversity, based at Columbia University.¹¹³ The reasons are clear. Dalits are themselves divided by caste and by language. The literacy rate for Dalits in 2001 was 55 per cent across India, but as low as 29 per cent in Bihar.¹¹⁴ Most Dalits are poor. Little purchasing power means little attraction for advertisers. The Web, for all its cheap production and interactivity, requires access to expensive technology, which the vast majority of Dalits do not have. A signal of a changed India

¹¹¹ “US newsroom employment declines”, 16 April 2009, <http://www.asne.org/print.cfm?printer=%2Findex%2Ecfm%3Fid%3D7323> (downloaded 1 July 2009).

¹¹² *The Bhopal Document: Charting a New Course for Dalits for the 21st Century* (Bhopal: Government of Madhya Pradesh, 2002), pp. 76-7.

¹¹³ Morgan et al. (eds), *Authentic Voice* and <http://www.theauthenticvoice.org/>. Arlene Morgan, “Remembering Nancy Maynard”, *Columbia Journalism Review*, 24 September 2008, http://www.cjr.org/behind_the_news/remembering_nancy_maynard.php?page=all&print=t (downloaded 1 July 2009). *Khabar Lahariya*, a weekly in Bundelkhand in UP, has some of these qualities. It has a print run of 4,000 copies. *Deccan Herald*, 19 August 2009, <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/19806/dalit-newspaper-strives-social-justice.html> (downloaded 19 August 2009) and Ninan, *Headlines*, pp. 145-6.

¹¹⁴ Of the major states, Kerala had the highest rate of SC literacy at 83 per cent in the 2001 census, followed by Maharashtra (72 per cent) and Gujarat (71 per cent). UP was 46 per cent, Rajasthan 52 per cent and Madhya Pradesh 59 per cent.

will occur when a well-known Dalit identity anchors a major television show or edits a major newspaper.¹¹⁵

"Women," on the other hand, Ammu Joseph wrote in 2006, "are no longer missing from the Indian media."¹¹⁶ Women anchors and reporters are prominent on both English-language and Indian-language television. It was even possible to find one Dalit woman journalist, though not on a daily newspaper or on TV. Jeyarani was working as a reporter on the Tamil weekly magazine *Ananda Viketan* (circulation 370,000). She became estranged from her family when she took a journalism course, and they became reconciled only when she began to get bylines for the popular magazine. "She has set some trends," a survey of women journalists reported. "She travels alone on assignment [and] learnt photography to ... illustrate her stories."¹¹⁷ Another woman journalist, daughter of the proprietor of *Navakal*, the raucous Marathi daily of Mumbai (this book, pp. 209, 211, 221), proudly did seven days in jail for criticizing a Supreme Court judge.¹¹⁸

The experience of most women journalists, especially on Indian-language newspapers, was less symbolic and inspirational. Too often, they faced low wages, insecurity of tenure and sexual harassment.¹¹⁹ A survey in 2003 concluded that women in the Indian-language press were "worse off" than "those in the English press".¹²⁰ Yet it was possible to argue that "women journalists are radically changing the media and giving it a broader base".¹²¹ Mrinal Pande of *Hindustan* (this book, pp. 148, 176), one of India's most prominent editors, argued that "both middle class urban women and vernacular languages seem poised for a breakthrough Both have acquired a remarkable centrality in India's electoral politics and the media".¹²² When the Australian government, anxious to counteract bad publicity about attacks on Indian students, brought five journalists from India to Australia in June 2009, four of them were women.¹²³ Their

¹¹⁵ Mehta, *India on Television*, p. 305.

¹¹⁶ Ammu Joseph and Kalpana Sharma, *Whose News? The Media and Women's Issues*, 2nd edition (New Delhi: Sage, 2006), p. 24.

¹¹⁷ *Status of Women Journalists in India* (New Delhi: National Commission for Women, n.d. [2004]), p. 85.

¹¹⁸ *Times of India*, 12 and 16 July 2003, [http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/artcileshow/msid-72055\[and 79312\]](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/artcileshow/msid-72055[and 79312]) (downloaded 3 July 2009). *Status of Women Journalists*, pp. 71-2.

¹¹⁹ *Status of Women Journalists*, pp. iv, 47-52.

¹²⁰ *Status of Women Journalists*, p. 61. The same survey recorded that women in the English press thought women were well represented; those in the Hindi press felt women were underrepresented (p. 102).

¹²¹ *Status of Women Journalists*, p. 8.

¹²² *Status of Women Journalists*, p. 57.

¹²³ Divya Iyer (CNN-IBN), Natasha Jog (NDTV), Roli Srivastava (*Times of India*) and

selection, however, underlined a frequently made point: all were from the English media, where women were considered to have relatively equal opportunities. "All women journalists put together in the four languages of the south," wrote R. Akhileshwari, "will not equal the number of women in the English language press." Women were "often paid less than men, have no job security, ... have less opportunities, and face more sexual harassment than their sisters in the English language media".¹²⁴

The promise, however, for women in Indian-language journalism may lie in the power of the market. A survey in 2006 noted that even Hindi newspapers had begun to "acknowledge the importance of the woman reader" by running stories and producing supplements geared to the needs of a household manager who buys products and looks for value. "The effort should be," wrote Manjula Lal, "to steer those supplements towards meaningful themes."¹²⁵ Mrinal Pande, as an experienced editor with an eye on budgets, spelled out the economic reasons why, as female literacy rose sharply, women in the newsrooms of Indian-language newspapers were essential: "Working women ... are decision makers who decide what media products the family will buy. Since most of our women are more comfortable in their mother tongues, ... it is clear to see the scope for growth of intelligent, women-friendly papers."¹²⁶

Pande is optimistic about Hindi media and about women's roles. "The days of you not being able to reach anywhere because you are a woman or you speak Hindi are over," she writes. "There is a growing realisation that if English is the language of the elite, Hindi is the language of the power elite."¹²⁷ This equation highlights the votes and the spending power that are represented by women and by Hindi.

But it does not work for Dalits. To be sure, literacy among Dalits is rising. More than half of Dalit adults are literate – about two-thirds of men and 40 per cent of women, which equates to 85 million literate Dalits.¹²⁸ Such growth in literacy no doubt played a part in building the Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh. But these literates are spread across a dozen languages and most are desperately poor. For newspaper owners, they lack the coherence and spending power of, for example, a marketer's category

Anita Joshua (*The Hindu*). The lone male was Murali Krishnan (IANS).

¹²⁴ *Status of Women Journalists*, p. 61.

¹²⁵ Manju Kak, Prajnashree Tripathy, Manjula Lal (eds), *Whose Media? A Woman's Space* (New Delhi: Concept, 2007), p. 213.

¹²⁶ *Status of Women Journalists*, p. 58.

¹²⁷ Mrinal Pande, "English for the Elite, Hindi for the Power Elite", in Uday Sahay (ed.), *Making News: Handbook of the Media in Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 66.

¹²⁸ These are the 2001 census figures. Literacy among Dalit women was as low as 16 per cent in Bihar.

such as “Hindi-speaking middle-class women”. Dalit spending power is yet to be demonstrated in ways that would encourage a media proprietor to depend on Dalit subscribers and advertisers or for a mainstream newspaper to focus constantly on Dalit stories. Until Indian capitalism identifies a large class of Dalit consumers, a Dalit presence in media – in print, on screens and in newsrooms – will be small and muted.

The revolution continues ...?

When the English-language “print journalism world is in slash-and-burn mode”, according to one talented observer, what is the future for Indian-language newspapers and what does their future mean for society and politics in India?¹²⁹

Indian-language newspapers face challenges common to newspapers elsewhere in the world: from television in its many forms, from the Web, from cellular technologies, from the uncertainty of advertising, from economic recession. But there are distinctively Indian factors that suggest Indian-language newspapers have a promising future for at least the next generation. The thirteen big languages and their eleven scripts are entrenched; they draw their readers from millions of people taught from primary school in scripts that are common to them alone. This captive market, within a single sovereign state, is unique. The *New York Times* can go to Fargo, North Dakota, or San Francisco; it is more difficult for *Malayala Manorama* to open a successful newspaper in Bhubaneswar or Ahmedabad. It is possible to break into a language market that is not your own, as *Divya Bhaskar* showed in Gujarat; but it is not easy.

The Indian-language newspaper industry is also insulated by the fact that 70 per cent of Indians still live in the countryside, and newspapers, for now, are able to reach them more cheaply and reliably than electronic challengers. Regular electricity supply is a luxury in much of rural India, and that, plus the cost of the hardware, retards the spread of television and the Web. A newspaper, on the other hand, is cheap. In 2009 when the average wage for a rural worker in north India was Rs 85 a day, a newspaper costs as little as Rs 2 (four US cents), and up to 30 per cent of that cost could be redeemed by selling yesterday’s newspaper to a waste-paper merchant.¹³⁰ To connect with this rural market dailies like *Dainik Jagran* published from more than twenty centres, each edition carrying both a whiff of its own local character as well

¹²⁹ David Simon, “Build the Wall”, *Columbia Journalism Review* (July-August 2009), p. 36.

¹³⁰ *Financial Express*, 1 January 2009, <http://www.financialexpress.com/news/getting-our-moneys-worth/405302/0#> (downloaded 27 August 2009). Newspaper owners, agonizing over the dangers of raising the price, calculated in 2009 that they needed a price of Rs 7 per copy within three years. *The Hindu*, 28 August 2009, <http://www.thehindu.com/2009/08/28/stories/20090828601313000.htm> (downloaded 28 August 2009).

as the preoccupations of a national daily. In the days when Europe and North America were predominantly rural, country people were not exposed to mass-circulation daily newspapers covering their localities; offset presses and electronic transmission of copy did not exist. India is perhaps the first place in history where a daily newspaper filled with local and general news comes to villages at breakfast.

Mass literacy and mass media have arrived simultaneously in India. For now at least, television and cellphones appear to be friends of literacy and print. Though hard evidence is scant, these technologies seem to encourage literacy: a person wants to be literate in order to run the technology better and to emulate the classes who use the technology. Television whets the appetite for newspapers.

Politics provokes the hunger for news. Evidence from elsewhere, particularly Kerala, suggests that as larger numbers of people are caught up in political activity as members of organizations and supporters of leaders and movements, the demand for newspapers grows. In Uttar Pradesh, the number of literate people grew from 30 million to more than 90 million between 1981 and 2001. At the same time, the Bahujan Samaj Party, the most striking development in Indian politics in the past generation, was born, grew and won government in its own right in 2007. During this time, the number of individual daily newspapers, and the *circulation* of daily newspapers, in Uttar Pradesh both trebled.¹³¹

In this mixture, though there is much that is “modern” in recognizable, global terms, much is distinctively Indian. No other place has a comparable system of caste capable of deploying the range of disadvantages that Dalits face. Practices and values of family businesses, particularly in north India, are often related to caste; they are passed on from generation to generation; and they do not always square with the expectations of global capitalism.¹³² In no other place has electoral democracy been practised among such a vast rural, socially diverse and often illiterate population. No other place has simultaneously embraced mass literacy, mass media, mass marketing and mass television – in a multiplicity of scripts and languages.

Indian-language newspapers have created “publics” where in the past only word-of-mouth transmission of information prevailed. Such “public spheres” need not be gentle, cosmopolitan or benign. Much depends on the people who control the media and the people who work there. But the spread of newspapers opens possibilities that, even a generation ago, many people could scarcely have dreamed of.

¹³¹ *Press in India* (New Delhi: Registrar of Newspapers for India [for appropriate years]), 1991, p. 307; *PII, 2005-06*, p. 215. Literacy in UP rose from 41 per cent in 1990 to 57 per cent in 2001.

¹³² Damodaran, *India's New Capitalists*, pp. 8-41.

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